




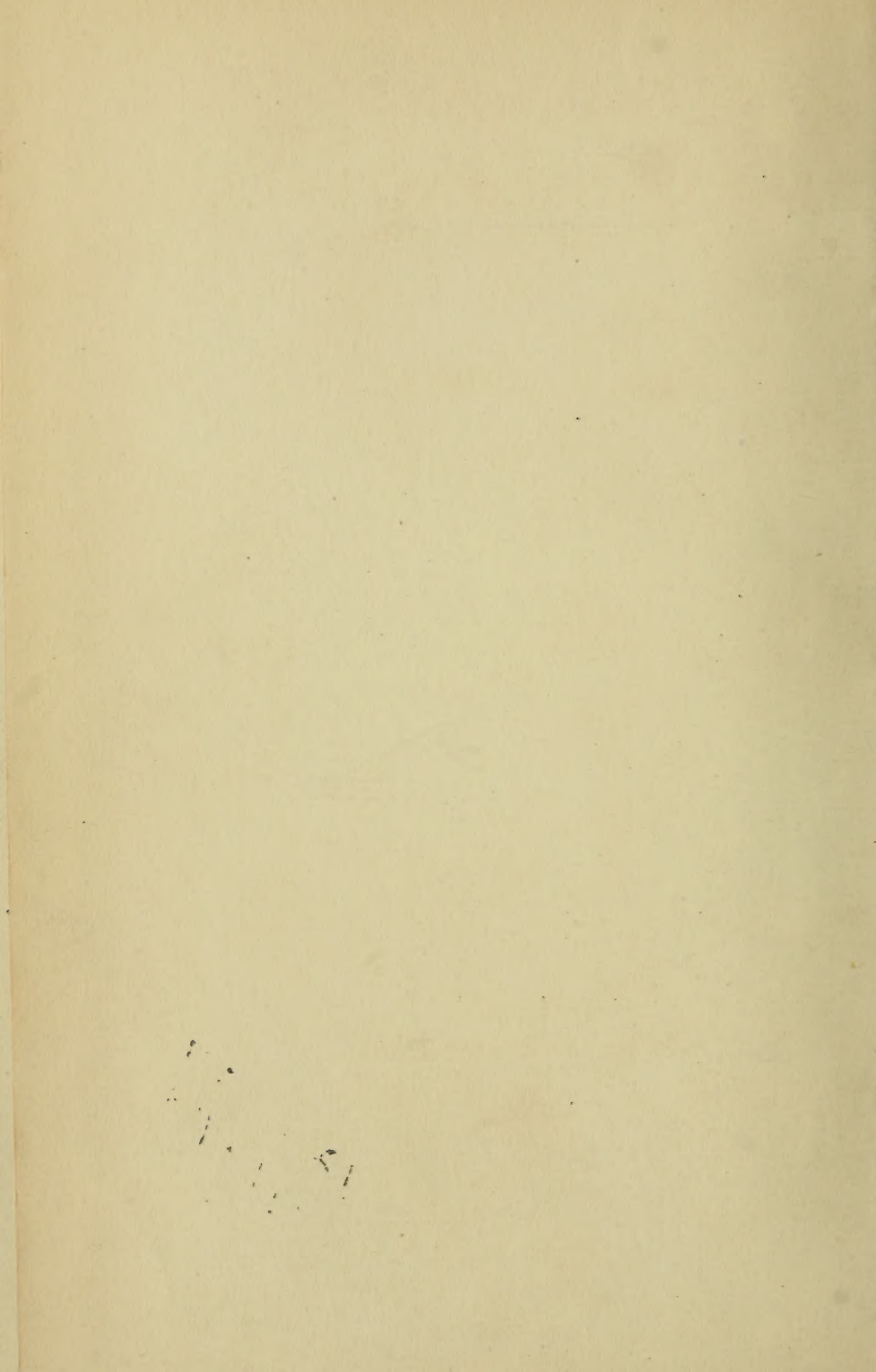
3 1761 07528382 0







Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2009 with funding from  
University of Toronto





HSwi  
S395p.

# PEAKS AND PLEASANT PASTURES

BY

CLAUD SCHUSTER

*Levavi oculos meos in montes  
unde veniet auxilium mihi*

OXFORD  
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1911

127327  
1714113

**HENRY FROWDE**  
**PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**  
**LONDON, EDINBURGH, NEW YORK**  
**TORONTO AND MELBOURNE**

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
EPISTLE DEDICATORY TO MISS LUCY WALKER .	5
ALPINE WANDERINGS :	
1902. BREGAGLIA AND MASINO . . .	9
1908. I. DAUPHINÉ. THE SCENTED LAND	27
II. THE TEMPLES IN THE WILDERNESS	35
III. IN COUTTET'S GARDEN . . .	47
1909. I. BEHIND THE SCENES . . .	56
II. STEPPING WESTWARD . . .	67
III. THE FREEDOM OF THE COUNTRY	76
1910. I. THE PATH OF AUTOLYCUS . .	86
II. BETWEEN DORON AND DORA .	97
III. THE CHIEF THINGS . . .	110
1911. I. THE WESTERN OBERLAND . .	118
II. JUNGFRAU AND SCHRECKHORN .	126
III. BREITHORN AND BIETSCHHORN .	134
THE MIDDLE AGE OF A MOUNTAINEER . .	142
MOUNTAINEERING . . . . .	179
THE CUP AND THE LIP . . . . .	205
DUCDAME . . . . .	222



## MAPS

1. THE DISGRAZIA . . . . . *Between pages 8 and 9*
2. MONT BLANC FROM CHAMONIX TO COUR-  
MAYEUR . . . . . *Between pages 48 and 49.*
3. GENERAL MAP OF THE TARENDAISE WITH  
PARTS OF THE MAURIENNE AND OF THE  
PROVINCE OF AOSTA . . . . . *Facing page 59*
4. VAL D'ISÈRE, VALGRISANCE, AND VAL DE  
RHEME . . . . . *Between pages 64 and 65*
5. THE HEADWATERS OF THE ISÈRE AND THE  
ARC . . . . . *Between pages 90 and 91*

## NOTE

THE papers entitled *Mountaineering* and *The Cup and the Lip* first appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, and I am indebted for permission to reproduce them to Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. The four series of *Alpine Wanderings*, 1908, 1909, 1910, and 1911, first appeared in *The Times*, and I am indebted for permission to reproduce them to the Times Publishing Company Limited. The maps have been drawn for me by Mr. E. H. New.

## EPISTLE DEDICATORY

*To Miss Lucy Walker*

DEAR MISS WALKER,

You have a threefold responsibility for this book. When my undergraduate feet still all but tottered, and my heart shrank, you confirmed the feeble knees and encouraged the failing spirit. When that time came at which the natural man is about to beat his ice-axe into a hobby-horse and twist his rope into leading-reins, you reminded me and instructed another as to the right use of those implements. And, having by judicious advice and copious jam made this book possible, you, at a moment when I was flushed with our Christmas festivities, laid commands upon me that the scattered papers which compose it should be collected and published. I have obeyed, and this is the result.

You are, however, only indirectly responsible for the fact that the book comes to you and the public without the usual photographic embellishments. As I have often pointed out, the mountaineer is a modest man. Perhaps I should have been wiser had I fallen in with the fashion and hoped to distract the atten-



tion of the reader from the imperfection of my text by the aid of process blocks. I confess a great debt to Alpine photography. If it has sometimes kept me shivering in positions rather amusing to the onlooker than comfortable to the model, it has given me many happy hours in the winter, wondering at the art of Mr. Spencer, or Dr. Tempest Anderson, or gaining a vicarious heroism in the eyes of my friends as they look on the attitudes of the patients of some more sensational observers. Will you count it altogether for superfluity of pride in me that I have dared to return to an earlier example, and to ask you to sympathize with and shudder at my narrative with your heart alone?

These papers are republished almost in the form in which they first appeared in print. While I have corrected some obvious slips, I have not tried to bring them up to date or to revise the hasty judgments which some of them express. They stand, therefore, for what they are—the record of impressions formed at the time by an average mountaineer of limited knowledge and experience. They are not presented as having any value of the topographical sort, nor do they embody the results of original research, and any one is free to doubt whether a book on mountaineering can have any value if it is not in one or other of these two matters.

Climbing-books are necessarily autobiographical.



They necessarily include many references to Heinrich this and Johann that, sweet morsels to the teller but arid stuff to the listener. We are trying from mere fullness of heart to communicate the incommunicable. We ask for forgiveness if in doing so 'the sound is forced, the notes are few'. There is irony in that we who lay claim to the solitude of the sanctuary should strive ourselves to draw others to its secrets. These things we cannot explain. But you and I know what we have found in the hills and why we want to call the world to witness.

*I remain,*

*Your grateful and attached*

CLAUD SCHUSTER.

WOR. *I beshrew him for his counsel! There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world, than is that unto which he hath directed thee; and that thou shalt find if thou wilt be ruled by his counsel. . . . Hear me. I am older than thou: thou art like to meet with, on the way which thou goest, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and in a word, death, and what not! These things are certainly true, having been confirmed by many testimonies. And why should a man so carelessly cast away himself by giving heed to a stranger. . . . How camest thou by thy burden at first?*

CHR. *By reading this book in my hand.*

WOR. *I thought so: and it has happened unto thee as to other weak men, who, meddling with things too high for them, do suddenly fall into thy distractions; which distractions do not only unman men (as thine I perceive have done thee) but they run them desperate ventures to obtain they know not what.*





# The DISGRAZIA



1. Bagni del Marino
2. P. Badile
3. P. Cengalo

4. Gl. della Bondasca
5. Cima della Bondasca
6. Mte. Sissone

Samaden



Pontresina

Morteratsch Rest

Bernina Houses

Hospice

Bernina Pass

Bianco

P. Bernina

M. di Scerscen

P. Roseg

Gr. Agüzza

P. Zurio

G. d. Felt

aria

Val Campo

Moto

Lanterna

sa

Madonna di Tirano

TIRANO

R. Adda

TELLINA

SONDRIO

le Prese

L. di Poschiavo

Brusio

Poschiavo

10. Forbicina

11. Lower Scerscen Glacier

12. Upper " "

7. Casera Pioda

8. Cecilia Hut

9. Preda Rossa Alp

E. H. Ngw 1911





## ALPINE WANDERINGS, 1902

### BREGAGLIA AND MASINO

AT the end of the long trench of the main Engadine Valley, its face turned to a swamp, a lake and an even monotony of road, stretching out indefinitely between an almost equally even monotony of sloping woods and stones, stands one of the largest and ugliest buildings in the world. The generous enthusiasm of its builder looked that it should make him a fortune as a gambling saloon. The Federal Government willed otherwise, and chance and some favouring star have provided an excellent hotel at one of the bleakest and most inhospitable spots in the Alps. The face of the building is, as I have said, turned to a swamp ; it is characteristic that its back should be turned to Italy. Sometimes, when the population tire for a little of tennis on dirt courts and golf, cotillons, and the like, they walk up the little hillock behind the hotel, cross the great high road, and reach the unfinished château where the projector of the place was to have taken his ease while his fortune was a-making. The clang of conversation in the great hall of the hotel suggests something of the evening of Pentecost ; here, if the

visitors have eyes and understanding, you might every evening hear praise of the wonderful works of God. The road from Switzerland, after running with no perceptible gradient all along the valley, gathers itself up, with a zigzag or two, before it reaches the top of the pass, and then plunges down and is hidden in the deep wood of the slope at your feet, to reappear, a mere white ribbon, some hundreds of feet below. So steep is the slope, so thick the wood, that, whether you look from above or below, a passage seems impossible, and, as you stand at the view-point which I have selected, Italy is cut from you by an impassable chasm. Deep down are the white houses of Casaccia, and beyond them still the road winds down through forest into a gorge that ever narrows, hung round with the blue mystery of the South, and lost at last in the shadow of mountains that stand round about the Lombard Plain.

But the mountaineer, instead of looking idly down to Como, will lift up his eyes to the hills on either side. On the right is the broken highland country which stretches towards the Simplon and the Bernardino; on the left a continuous wall of rock broken at its summit into a wild succession of peaks as fantastic as any in the Alps. From their bases run a succession of glens, only suggesting their existence to the traveller in the main valley by an occasional gleam of ice seen through the trees or by the great

torrents which they send down to the Mera stream. I cannot hope to reproduce the wildness and mystery which hang round these mountains.

Behold me, therefore, turning from the Maloja, amid the unconcealed certainty of the inhabitants that I should never return alive from so desperate a venture—‘Was I going to be tied with that rope?’ ‘How very perilous must be my errand!’ ‘Had I telegraphed to the hut for bed and dinner?’ ‘What! going to sleep on straw?’ and so on and so on, until my blushes at my rope and my big boots and my torn raiment threatened to become permanent, and Henry’s curses at the *verdammt Schweinerei* of the waiter for delaying our provisions were embarrassing. At last we were off. My army consisted of Henry aforesaid, native of the Saas Valley, 28 years of age, 6 feet 2 inches high, somewhat silent and sardonic in the valley, a terror on the hills; and Pietro, native of Stampa in Bregaglia, aged 40, small, rotund, and débonnaire, with bright eyes and curling yellow beard, dweller at Maloja with his ‘momma’, as he called her, an excellent cook and a most incompetent mountaineer, taken with us for the local knowledge of the other side, which he didn’t possess.

I have said that the glens of Val Bregaglia are secluded. The most hidden but the most frequented is that of the Forno. Though the top of Cima di Rosso, ‘loneliest, exquisite, apart,’ seen from Maloja,

suggests a fine range of mountains, you might penetrate deep into the recesses of the hills without suspecting the existence of the glacier. There are moods in which one can only be satisfied with the gorgeous ostentation of the Gorner or the Mer de Glace, and the majesty of mountain form disclosed from topmost pinnacle down to valley floor. In other manifestations of the mountain spirit you need a sense of separation from the murmur of the valley, and you may well be satisfied with the Forno. Furthermore, the Forno peaks have the merit of shortness. 'It is high time,' says Montaigne, 'to go to bed when our legs faile us'; and as one's holiday grows shorter year by year and London is shaken off with more and more difficulty, the delights of a return to afternoon tea come to outweigh those of an impromptu bivouac.

To reach the hut you must tramp along an easy, pleasant path, then turn a sharp corner, and climb the very steep lower slopes of the glacier, before the charm is suddenly disclosed; a great wall of ice and *névé* sweeping round from east to west, battlemented on the north by little rock peaks, the Torrioni, as forbidding as any in the Alps. On either hand easy passes lead to the adjoining glens. The wall on the north appears impregnable, and, on its further side, is perhaps unsuited for the descent of fathers of families. But just at the extreme south-west corner,



where the Torrone ridge abuts on the western wall, stands the highest mountain of the district, the Cima di Castello, and at the point of abuttal a cleft, 'Passo Lurani,' easy to reach from either side, gives direct access to Italy. From the Pass the wall turns southward, the Castello itself rising, as its name implies, like the keep of a castle, with an apparently unsurmountable precipice from glacier to summit. The edge of the precipice from the Pass is of appalling steepness. The face is sheer and very difficult of access, since it is cut off from the glacier at its foot by slabs which, I suppose, are quite impassable. Above the slabs it breaks back a little, and offers plenty of foot and hand holes ; but the obvious way to the top is to turn these difficulties by ascending a short gully to the ridge which descends from the mountain and bounds the glacier on the west, and walk up a steep snow or ice ridge. The other side of the mountain, that facing to the Albigna Glen, is, I fancy, quite easy.

Our objective was this gully. But the sharp air of the morning touched Henry's blood. I had suspected him the previous evening as he ran me up to the hut, from the earnestness of his disclaimers of ambition. No new ways would ever tempt him from the straight and easy path. He too was a married man. His father, it was true, had been a dashing fellow in his day. 'Still is he angry if I do anything out of the way, angry from jealousy. Last

time I made a new way he cut me for a fortnight. But I, I make no *dummheit*.' All this seemed to me a bit thick, and I was not so much surprised as distressed that while we walked in the grey dawn over the level glacier the sight of so many peaks upset his scruples. Each of the Torroni as we passed it seemed to me spikier and nastier; its slopes more apt channels for falling stones, its base a less eligible spot to fall on; but up each he wanted to drag us, and if we had been roped I veritably believe would have made the attempt. I stopped my ears and plugged as hard as I could after Pietro, who was taking refuge from this demoniac man by flight to the easy paths he knew. At last, as we reached the parting of the ways, one on the right to the orthodox gully, the other on the left to the Passo Lurani, my master could be controlled no longer: 'Has the Castello ever been climbed from the pass?' We admitted tremblingly that it had not (I don't know whether we were right), and Pietro added that he knew it to be impossible. That decided Henry. 'I wanted to show that damned pig-dog how we go in the Valais,' he admitted afterwards. I was weak, and we made for the pass.

We were there in a few minutes, and, as we ate our breakfasts, contemplated the work before us. The ridge rose very steeply, and with less and less promise the higher it got. Still it might be possible to follow it until a point was reached above the steep slabs,

which I have mentioned as cutting off the upper part of the face, and then to turn on to the face where it was more broken. If this point could be reached and the face gained success was certain. We packed up and advanced.

After a few feet of steep ascent and a scramble over a big stone, we found ourselves at the foot of a deep crack in the arête itself, rather like a furrow in a Homburg hat set up on end. Henry wriggled up with back and knees, and as the work was too serious for encumbered men, we left our sacks and two axes. I was hauled up and Pietro followed somehow. Then the leader, after a few more feet on the ridge, began to traverse to the right and upwards on to the face. He was soon round the corner and out of sight, and those anxious moments which every climber knows dragged slowly out. That grim and yet pleasurable mounting of the heart as a horse gathers himself between our knees and rises, as the gust suddenly freshens and the sheet grinds before it and the boat heels, what are they to the climber's sense, half joy of battle, half fear of defeat, when the rope goes slowly away into nothingness, as only the grunts of the leader and the scratching of his boots tell him that he is not alone with immensity.

There is betwixt that smile we would aspire to,  
That sweet aspect of *nature* and *her* ruin,  
More pangs and fears than war or women have.



I had reserved my right of private judgement as to turning back if we should find difficulties. As the weary time went on I determined to exercise it, and commanded retreat. The only answer was a stern command to come on, and I obeyed. Henry was still invisible when I got round the corner and turned my attention to Pietro, who followed very well, though he kept up a continual flow of protest. Henry from his superior position vowed that matters were improving, though his rate of progress did not convince me. After some more agonized grunts the rope between us became taut. 'I am very badly placed here,' he announced, 'come on, but carefully, for I cannot hold you.' I crawled on a few feet until my rope from Pietro was exhausted. Henry again advanced until again the rope between us restrained him. 'Is it all finished?' he said, 'then you must *los binden* yourself. Further you cannot come until I am safe. *Hier ist's sehr schlecht.*' The process of binding oneself loose is always inconvenient. When you want all your legs and arms to hold on by it is disgusting. I did my best amid adjurations to be quick (*Hier ist's sehr schlecht*), which I answered by recommendations to come back. 'I cannot come back,' was the answer. Again the rope went slowly out, the slack from Pietro passed me, it went quicker and quicker, and at last a confident shout proclaimed the arrival on the easy

rocks of the face. I then began to follow ; deciding after a moment that the difficulty must be the result of starting with the wrong foot, tried the other, tried both hands and a swing, and at last resigned myself to the inevitable, felt the rope tighten, consoled my spirit with communing on moral support, and, relying on it and something more, lay panting beside the triumphant Henry.

We rollicked up the final rocks ; were driven from the top by wind and storm ; stumbled uncomfortably with our one axe down to the gully and the glacier, and were soon glad to be on the pass again and to toast our victory !

The most wearisome part of the day was still before us. Our goal was the Baths of Masino, divided from us by more than 7,000 feet of descent and a long valley walk. Below us was a gully, filled with snow or ice, but bent so that only the first hundred feet or so were visible. We descended slowly to a rock, whence we could see its length stretching, between the bare walls which squeezed it in, down to a little glacier, and then the meadows. If it was ice many hours were before us ; one step reassured us. It was snow, exactly of the right consistency and at the right angle, and, with a joyful shout, we were off on that most exhilarating of all forms of progression, a sitting glissade. As usually happens when I take part in this amusement, I finished with my head in

the small of the back of the man in front of me, my legs in the air, my pockets and boots full of snow, and my whole body a plaster of wet dirt and stones. But my spirits were high; and when I had been picked up, shaken, and duly rebuked for my behaviour, I could bask by the stream and let my fancy go. The head of the glen into which we had descended is at once wild and tender. The cliffs are bare and savage, mysterious ravines gleam from the fastnesses which keep in the glen, white water shoots out from the woods and disappears again in cataract to the valley. The orderly grandeur of Switzerland, with its broad Alps, its well marshalled peaks, is gone; instead you have narrow clefts and fantastic summits, and here high up a green sward where the valley has broadened a little, before the stream takes its last swoop to Val di Mello between crags which almost meet. Once more I had accomplished my soul's pilgrimage

and loosed my spirit's bands  
And come again to the land of lands.

We are in Italy, I cried, with all the zest of one whose childhood was nurtured on Rogers's and Turner's vignettes, and if I did not add

And shall we sup where Juliet at the masque  
Saw her loved Montagu and now sleeps by him,  
it was partly because we obviously should not and



partly because Henry somewhat unsympathetically replied 'Yes, and a *verdammte Schweinerei* of a land it is. It's not the first time I have been in Italy'. And though the herds at the Alps were kind and gave us of their best, he would not drink the milk because the bowl in which it was offered was dirty, and only excused me for paying a franc for what he said was worth 2*d.* because they were *arme Leute*. Indeed, the condition of the inhabitants of Val Masino and its tributary glens invites compassion. Nowhere in the Alps is the struggle for existence more difficult. Very few miles further down is the luxuriance of Val Tellina, which, though for centuries the highway of armies, preserves an appearance of sleepy fatness and fertility among imperturbable sloth. There is an air of poverty, but of the comic opera order, a Neapolitan acquiescence in the receipt of what Nature sends, an almost deliberate choice of carelessness and joy for riches and labour. Here man seems to have striven with set teeth and abandoned the fight, poverty has become misery, continual disappointment has ended in despair. The herdsman high up in the Alps sleeps where his charge is grazing, under a rock in a rough circle of stones, and the big Casera on the lower Alp is often deserted in the summer and, when tenanted, has holes in the roof and is always filthy. Count Lurani, the explorer of the valley, notes a roughness in the people unusual

in the Italian Alps and, though I have always found them friendly and hospitable, sometimes to the point of self-sacrifice, they are certainly wonderfully ignorant and slow, their speech is almost incomprehensible even to their fellow countrymen, and, though they are within a few hours of an electric railway and big markets, their methods of agriculture and of cheese-making are mediaeval.

The day reproduced the scenery of *The Two Voices* and, lying on the Alp, we wondered at the heights from which we had descended.

The summits slope  
Beyond the furthest flights of hope,  
Wrapt in dense cloud from base to cope.  
Sometimes a little corner shines,  
As over rainy mist inclines  
A gleaming crag with belts of pines.

We should be lucky to get home dry, but, as we took our way to the main valley, we were not sorry for the clouds. A warm and clement air came up from Italy, and, as we ran down through the wood, we dripped. Of course we lost our way, and stumbled and rolled and laughed and raced and were happy when we emerged into Val di Mello and came to the stream, which bubbles down among moss and stones as if it were in Devonshire. The very place for a foot-washing, said Henry, and in a moment he was wading well above his thighs, his gigantic form looking

singularly ludicrous as he caught at his torn knickerbockers to keep them from the water. When I could overcome my modesty I followed. Pietro was longer before he could take part in so unorthodox an ending to a climbing day. At last he was persuaded. 'Ugh! what feet,' said Henry, 'black as a chimney.' But nothing could ruffle the little man's good nature; the plunge once made, he could not be induced to put on his stockings again and he marched into the Bagni with his trousers tucked up and his legs bare like a big bearded baby.

Every stony step down the Val di Mello was an excitement to me and my memory, and an injury to my feet. At dirty grey S. Martino, you turn from your downward course, if you are bound for the Baths, and ascend the beautiful little Val dei Bagni, first through flowery meadows and then through Italian forest, not of pines but real trees with undergrowth and, seen dimly through, huge granite walls. Here thought of struggle and wretchedness disappears, and with it all idea of man, when suddenly

The clouds are broken in the sky,  
And through the mountain-walls  
A rolling organ-harmony  
Swell up, and shakes and falls;

it is a young lady from Milan practising the piano, and you have reached the little clearing in which stand the hotel and bath-house.



We caused a little flutter among the guests. I myself had been at Masino in 1901, and Professor Kennedy a little earlier in the same year. Three other English parties had visited the hotel since 1890, and, if any, very few, between that year and Mr. Freshfield's first expedition there some time in the sixties. Owing to the character, I suppose, of previous visitors it is an article of faith with the Italian guests that all Englishmen are heroes and accomplished linguists, a point of view which makes a sojourn at Masino both embarrassing and fatiguing. Henry's appearance diverted to him most of the attention, and he was fortunately ignorant of the fact that Pietro took advantage of his ignorance of Italian to explain to the eager crowd that he—Pietro—was the guide and Henry the porter. As they chattered the barber recognized me, as he proudly told me, before the padrone, and hurried me off to the bathroom, and soon in that delicious state of wellbeing which comes of exercise and hot bath and bottled beer, I was sentimentalizing beside the stream.

The guides had a more eventful afternoon. In the first place, Henry had the first hot bath of his life, an experience that so enchanted him that, having previously taken counsel with me on the *Gesundheit* of hot baths for those unaccustomed to them, he repeated it continually in his spare moments during our three days' stay. In the second, he was

seized upon by the population, taken to the back of the inn, and photographed by all of them; and the third, he ate his first ice and found it *verdammt Schweinerei*.

Our next point and the chief object of my return to Masino was the ascent of the Disgrazia. Twice before had I attempted it and failed, as better men have failed on this and on harder mountains.

Alas, our expedition was only more successful in that we reached our peak. In 1901 we had made our attempt by Val di Mello and the Remoluzza Pass. This time we chose the ascent to the hut by Val Sasso Bisolo, and I remember no more beautiful hut walk. There is no haymaking in the Upper Alps here, and the beasts were still higher up among the stones, so that, late in August as it was, the meadows were still dressed in green and gold. I spare you descriptions of the lonely loveliness both of the woods and the green open space which ought to be lake and is not, just before the last great step of the valley. The Disgrazia alone would make the walk memorable, and, lying by the hut, turning sometimes to the glowing rocks of the Corno Bruciato, and sometimes to the deep blue and gleaming silver of the Lombard Alps, I passed afternoon and evening, in a lull of every faculty but that of vision. When the flames which once, according to the savage local legend, consumed the slopes of the Corno

Bruciato and the Sasso Arso to punish their churlish owner for his inhospitality to the wandering Christ, had been lit again by the sinking sun, and blazed out in glory, and rich, velvety darkness had covered the south, I joined the guides in the hut and slept confident in a turn of the luck for the morrow.

Our hopes were vain. Thick lifeless mist was round us as we started. Another party, who had slept in the ruins of the old hut, kept with us—two shoemakers from Sondrio and a student—presumably of shoemaking,—a curious looking caravan, clothed as to their heads with velvet tam-o-shanters and hung all round with useless articles fastened on with bits of string. Their competition made Pietro go even faster than usual, for his habit is to hurry his companions in easy places as much as he delays them in difficulties, and all our energies were employed at first in going slowly. But soon the others dropped behind, and when we had passed the glacier, discarded the rope, and were about to take to the rocks, we saw them through the fog turn reluctantly downwards. This lightened my heart a little, for they looked to me the kind of Alpine company which meets with regrettable incidents. Our ascent was quite without adventure; first up easy rocks on the mountain face, then for a few minutes on rocks not quite so easy on the crest, and we were on the top. My disappointment was extreme. The Disgrazia

looks westwards across the great Italian bay round which the Alps sweep in a semi-circle, and from almost every peak which I have climbed in southern Switzerland I have looked and longed towards it. It seemed hard not to reverse the process. Just for a moment, as we sat and munched, a wind from the south arose, blew past us to the Bernina and lifted the curtain. The great peaks stood dazzling in a new covering of snow, but, before I could point them out to Henry, the picture closed again and we were alone.

We descended by Val di Mello; by a gully made wonderful by the magnifying mist, paddled again in our stream for a blessed hour, and by two o'clock I was at the Baths again stammering an account of our adventures in broken Italian and German to the kindly folk.

An Alpine narrative must needs be a chronicle of small beer, and the brew, once tasted, lacks variety. One plod up a path in the dark, one plunge down a slope in the sun, is very like another, when you come to tell of it, and yet as it was suffered each had its peculiar shade of expectancy or agony. In each day one's memory lingers over some few moments of delight and awe which, when torn from their context, have little meaning for the listener. Still I spare you the details of the rest of my flash of summer, for another memory as trivial as any other recorded sensations of the hardened tourist.



We had walked up Cima di Rosso in doubtful weather, and as we reached the Forno hut on our return the storm fell upon us. It was the most terrific in my recollection, whirling round the two little glaciers between which the hut stands and seeming as if some lightning stroke must sooner or later strike the building itself. But it is not of the storm that I would write. After eight hours' thunder and snow, there came a sudden stillness, and we turned in, hoping that, after all, we might accomplish something in the morning. We left at 3 a.m. in a scene of cold, bright, moonlit splendour, as unusual as the violence of the preceding day. There was a great calm. Every stone was overlaid with snow, the glacier was a gleaming path between the orderly hills, standing like the crystal columns of a temple; and, leaving Henry from my thought for once, I could say 'How dreadful is this place'.

# ALPINE WANDERINGS, 1908

## I

### DAUPHINÉ: THE SCENTED LAND

LOOKING out from Mont Blanc over the silver heights and purple depths of the Italian hills, your eye, ranging over well-remembered ground, rests far southward and westward on two huge embattled ridges. You look still further southward to the lonely tower of Monte Viso, but your gaze returns and rests longingly and lovingly on those grim walls. They have a certain lure for the mountaineer, for, rising amid the stones and flowers of Dauphiné, they are the last bastion of the Alps against the plain of France—Ecrins and Meije—harsh in name and hardly to be won, the former the dearly gained first fruits of the great campaign of 1864, the second the last great Alpine peak to know the dominion of man.

If you would know them more closely, you must leave the P. L. M. line at Jarrie-Vizille, a few miles south of Grenoble, and squeeze yourself on to the little steam tramway which, in time, delivers you at Bourg d'Oisans. Here the world at large packs itself into the local motor-car. But the road, trodden by

so many conquerors, from Hannibal to Mr. Whymper, deserves a more deliberate passage, and wise men take a carriage. The horses jog sleepily along the hot level of the Romanche to where the river and the road barely escape from the mountain into the valley. Here the ascent begins, and you cease to care when or whether you will reach La Grave amid the extravagance of forest, cliff, and boulder, streams and waterfalls, that suggest the misty recesses from which they come, and the Romanche below, now fast bound by the walls of the Inferney gorge. Suddenly there strikes upon your sense a perfume, now faint, now insistent, which recalls vaguely the heat of London streets, and, as it persists, the drone of the street sellers. The mountain-side is gay with lavender, brighter in blue than that of English cottage gardens; the air is heavy with the scent of it; in one place a stolid peasant has taken the road as his drying ground, and the carriage wheels, crunching over the carpet, call out again the sweetness of the dead flowers. Amid this wild profusion of colour and perfume you mount, gleams coming to you soon of sunshine on the great Mont du Lans glacier on your right, until you turn the last corner and the stupendous magnificence of the Meije bursts upon you, 8,000 feet of precipice, ice mingled with rock, then ice, then enough green meadow and black slate to form the lower frame for the silver picture, incom-

## *Dauphiné : The Scented Land* 29

parable, solitary. The summit of Mont Blanc is more than half as high again above Chamonix, but the almost monotonous beauty of his snows stunts his pre-eminence. The upper levels of Val Tournanche and Val Anzasca do not come into comparison, for their mountains close a vista ; and even with the Stelvio in mind one can with confidence claim for La Grave the possession of the finest road view in the Alps.

When he has seen the view, the first thing which every mountaineer does on reaching La Grave is to leave it ! Let him do so, not by the obvious highway, the Brèche de la Meije—now through the building of the hut on the Promontoire so fallen from its great estate that a boy of nine crossed it this summer—but by the more discreet, for aged limbs, and less majestic Col du Clot des Cavales. Nor could you have a prettier path. A rock garden and a botanical dictionary, though no doubt helpful, are not strictly necessary aids to due humility of soul. I cannot name the flowers through which we brushed, but we adored even where we did not understand, and our worship was no less intense because the mountains through which the meadows of the Alpe of Villard d'Arène led us were to us, from mere familiarity with mountain form and mountain weather, something far mightier than they can ever be to him whose wanderings cease at the flower level.



Alas for feet still soft from London ! The meadows lead you to a valley of stones ; but the stones lead soon to snow and then a gentle ascent of half an hour brings you to the Col. Then a quick descent over an irregular path, and stones through which the grass vainly struggles for a living, and you are in the famous wilderness of the Vallon des Etançons.

An infinite amount of lamentation, and much profanity, has been poured out upon the stones of Dauphiné : and it is reported by those who know the clavier in the tributary glens of Val Louise that they inflict as much misery on the human foot as that member is able to endure. But the labours of the Société des Touristes du Dauphiné have furnished the Vénéon and Etançons glens with very tolerable footpaths along the valley floor. Higher up you must still stumble and slide. But, after all, if you avoid Val Louise, you can do a great deal of walking in Dauphiné without encountering anything to remind you of the horror of the descent from the Rimpfischhorn or the ruin of the path of the Col de Lauzon. The effect is really more moral than physical, for no path-making can do anything to mitigate the austerity of the Vénéon and Etançons. From the latter even the Meije, from the sheer monotony of its rock faces, seems at times stumpy and dull, and when La Bérarde itself is reached you come upon a scene of desolation to which my own

## *Dauphiné : The Scented Land* 31

Alpine experience knows no parallel. Others there be who claim for Scarl a predominance over La Bérarde for monotonous gloom, but I am not in a position to decide.

Here, low down on the valley floor with only glimpses of undistinguished snow-field at the head of the Glacier de la Pilatte, a few yards from some huddled cottages whose moss-covered thatch reminds one of a Highland glen, the Société des Touristes has erected a little chalet hotel. Two small trees and a boulder make it possible on a hot day for one person at a time to find shade. The corner of the hotel, combined with a large nail insecurely placed in the soft plaster of the wall, the letter-box, and a door-handle provide an agreeable exercise for trick climbing when it rains. And when you are tired of falling off the letter-box on to the door-step, you can by blandishments induce the cook, attired in full panoply of white cap, jacket, and apron, himself to undertake the passage perilous. Further it may happen to you, if the five crows which inhabit the valley trust themselves near the hotel, to see this same cook steal quietly from his kitchen, grasping the local artillery, and commence his afternoon's stalk. As the chase becomes more exciting, the white cap falls unheeded to the ground. After a few moments the white coat and apron follow, and the cook, suddenly transformed into an agile mountaineer,

disappears up the hill-side. Perhaps, an hour later, you may be rewarded by the report of a gun. In any case, the number of crows, during our stay in the valley, did not appear to suffer any material diminution. But, on the occasions when the chase was more than usually ardent, dinner was more than usually delayed.

The French as a people have not yet adopted mountaineering as a national sport with the same enthusiasm as the Italians, the inhabitants of central Switzerland, or the Austrians. It is possible to leave Lyons in the morning and sleep at La Bérarde. It is possible to breakfast at the Carrelet hut, cross the Ecrins, and sleep at Marseilles. But as yet the week-end climber, fortunately both for the district and for his own neck, has scarcely touched Dauphiné. If ever—which may the Fates forbid—the steam tram from Grenoble quickens its pace or the path from St. Christophe grows into a carriage road, matters will change; and it therefore behoves the English climber quickly to seek a district which, beyond any other great climbing centre, is still preserved for him and the best of his foreign brethren alone. Still, the little inn is generally full, and, when a day or two's bad weather fills the valley with parties on demurrage for the Ecrins and Meije, both it and the mountains tend to be overcrowded. Meanwhile, as the days pass on and you ramble for training on

the little rock peaks round the hotel, and your politeness and your bashfulness struggle with one another in your efforts to converse in a strange tongue with other storm-bound travellers, the place grows upon you, your longings for the *Bierschrund* and the little Dent de Veisivi die away, and the wilderness blossoms for you more than ever did Zermatt or Arolla in the days of your most desperate youth.

It would be tedious to describe the small Dauphiné climbs. They are very like one to another—a good path on the valley, sometimes a little glacier, always a little scramble on stones and hill-side (pleasantly intermingled in some cases by roots of trees), and at the end your reward—half an hour or more of real, though not difficult, rock-climbing. The whole forms an admirable exercise for the future. Then for those who fly at higher game there are the Ailefroide or the Etages or the Pic d'Olan, and for the view-hunter the Pic Coolidge and the Plaret. He, however, who is visiting Dauphiné for the first time comes with his mind set tensely on the two giants; and, in such a summer as that of 1908, he will do well to attempt them at the first moment that the absence of verglas allows. The season of 1908 was not prolific of such moments, and it was not until after many 'fierce daylights and famishing morrows', many a buffet by the wind and rain, after the exploration of all the Shoe-horns of the neighbourhood, and the



exhaustion of all the incomplete sixpenny novels in the hotel library, that at last three consecutive days of sunshine were pronounced by the local talent to have performed their acceptable work, and on an afternoon of splendour our little army moved up the valley of the Vénéon.

## II

### THE TEMPLES IN THE WILDERNESS

ONE hour and twenty minutes' easy walking, first along the almost level valley floor, and then up stones to the Carrelet, and thence another hour up the pathless steeps towards the Vallon de Pilatte, brings you to the shelf of streams and stones which forms the head of the glen. Behold us then at the Ecrins gîte, high up in the glen of the Vallon de Pilatte, two and a half hours' walking from La Bérarde, above us the great south wall of the Ecrins, and, across the main valley, the Pointe du Vallon des Etages, reproducing even in minute detail the form of the Matterhorn. Here, a few feet above the glacier torrent, a huge rock forms a roof and dried juniper bushes a luxurious couch; and here it is proposed to build a hut. True it is that the Carrelet—an hour below—is too low for the mountains and too close to the hotel; but, with every gratitude to the French Alpine Club, and to the Société des Touristes for their work in the district, it may be suggested that the existence of one useless hut is no reason for the erection of another. The gîte provides ample and airy accommodation for quite as many people as

ought to be on the Ecrins at the same time, and the Pic Coolidge and the Col de la Temple are easily accessible from La Bérarde. The multiplication of huts on this side of the chain can only result in the multiplication of the hut-haunter, that odious pest who breaks your skull by day with loose stones and racks your brain by night with his sing-songs.

A sunset, full rather of beauty than of promise, sent us to our sleeping-bags with gloomy minds ; and I was startled out of what seemed to be my first sleep by hideous yells far up the glen. A party sleeping at the Carrelet had passed us in the night, and were now far up on the way to the Col des Avalanches. As, if two parties are in the great Ecrins couloir at the same time, the danger to the second increases in proportion to the distance between them, we had to hurry. Gulping our tea with such sleepy curses as are appropriate to the hour, we turned to the ascent. The Carrelet gentlemen were in the mood to cut us down and hang us up to dry. Joseph accepted the challenge ; and I have rarely passed a more uncomfortable hour and a half, plunging over boulders, tumbling into streams, scratching up steep and slippery snow. I protested, but in vain. Pointing to the cliffs of the Pic Coolidge—at least a quarter of a mile away and wholly innocent of offence—our leader threatened us with falling stones and urged us on. At last we heard another yell, this

time below us ; and now, allowing the offenders to overtake us, we moderated our pace and proceeded in sullen silence. The route does not lead, as the *Climber's Guide* directs, to the Col des Avalanches, but turns to the left, some hundred feet below that pass, and makes for the very obvious couloir which, though it broadens out and becomes ill-defined high up on the face, practically brings you to the summit ridge. Still leading, we entered the couloir and began climbing on its left wall, the first few feet being difficult and made more so by ice. The rocks, though always steep, soon give better holds both for feet and hands, and afford climbing which, though delightful to accomplish, would be wearisome in description. Only two points call for notice.

Some short way up the couloir a long wire rope, wholly unnecessary, covers up the hand-holds and impedes progress. The overcoming of this obstacle was sufficiently irksome, and, when I reached its upper end, I found that some agency, probably lightning, had severed three-quarters of its strands. He will be a benefactor who completes the work thus auspiciously begun, and throws the whole mass down the couloir ; but we thought ourselves too recent acquaintances to take such liberties. After fifty minutes' scramble our stomachs, neglected in consequence of our hurried start, demanded nourishment. But our competitors, as they chose to make



themselves, could not endure a long halt. They must be up and doing, breaking a record on their own or other people's heads. Against such there is but one remedy. We put them in front, and from this point upwards, pressing close upon their heels, we hustled them steadily to the top of the mountain. Two-and-three-quarter hours' climbing brought us to the arête, some way to the south-east of the Pic Lory, and then ten minutes along ice and rock led to the summit. It can be but seldom that the south face is found in so favourable a condition; and the almost complete absence of glazed rocks, four days after an exceptionally unpleasant spell of weather, is a strong inducement to visit Dauphiné in an uncertain season. I ought to add, however, that the mountain had been 'reopened' on the previous day by a strong party of English amateurs and first-class guides, to whose labours on the ice we were greatly indebted.

We were now to follow the north-east arête until that ridge sinks sufficiently to allow the Glacier Blanc to be reached most easily. Here the conditions were not, and in a bad year cannot be, so favourable. Climbing in or on the walls of couloirs demands, no doubt, greater acrobatic powers than the passage of such arêtes as this. But the mixture of soft snow, hard ice, and rock, the infinite variety of now traversing and now surmounting the pinnacles of the

## *The Temples in the Wilderness* 39

ridge make a greater demand on the experience and steadiness of the whole party, and require mountaineering qualities which middle-age may consider with complacency to be of a higher order. It is curious to reflect—and the ridge gives plenty of time for reflection—what Messrs. Whympers and Moore would have thought of this ridge had they preferred Almer's advice to Croz's and followed it in all its length instead of the ice of the face.

Three-quarters of an hour brings you to the top of the steep slope above the glacier, and it was with some malicious pleasure that I observed the other party no longer so eager to press on. We made a long wait for them where the slope steepens, to avoid falling stones, and then parted company, they striking off right-handed for Val Louise and the south, and we left-handed for the Col des Ecrins. By now one at least of them had learnt by experience that other reasons besides manners render it inadvisable to race on a mountain until you have discovered the length of your opponent's foot. Subsequent inquiries have revealed the fact that the other traveller also found it necessary to take three or four hours' rest at the Ernest Caron hut. We, for our part, rushed down the glacier to the Col in the highest of spirits; and even the steep and black descent to the Bonne Pierre glen, though trying after the easy passage of the Glacier Blanc (we found the

couloir from the Col in such a condition that we could keep to the rock on its right all the way and neglect the ice and scanty snow in its recesses), even the vile stones and broken path of the Bonne Pierre glen, even the final insult of the little ascent round the Tête de la Maye, could not dash our pleasure ; and we ran into the little inn, twelve and a half hours from the gîte, after a day of delights second in my Alpine experience only to that which was to follow two days later.

The next morning but one two anxious parties roped in the Promontoire hut. We were to have the pleasant companionship of a French friend, readiest of good Samaritans in the valley and the hut, most infectiously enthusiastic of climbers on the mountains, whose kindly sympathy had already almost persuaded me that I could speak French and climb rocks. The moon, whose light was to take us up the first rocks, was at her full, but only now and then struggled through the tearing clouds. The wind howled through the Brèche and whistled round the hut. It is a safe rule, especially when you have waited a fortnight for a mountain, to start and persevere to the first difficulties ; but I doubt whether any one had much hope of success. At any rate, Maximin Gaspard, leading our friend's party, started off at a pace that gave no time for regrets, and his dash gave some hope throughout his company.

## *The Temples in the Wilderness* 41

Huge, black-bearded, with the gigantic moustaches which you expect to find on the heroes of feminine romance, prodigious in his gasconades, overpowering in his geniality, with the swagger and the songs of an ex-artilleryman, and the neatness of foot and the confidence of bearing of a mountain goat, he moved straight onwards and upwards in the mirk; and we must follow. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, there was a halt; an hour and a quarter had brought us to the site of the Pyramide Duhamel, and we could go no further in the wind. For my own part, I abandoned hope, put on all the clothes in my knapsack, and went to sleep. It was bitterly cold and the moon obscured. Dimly through my dreams I heard the murmurs of my companions and an occasional shriek of some wilder gust of tempest. At last, as I sleepily opened my eyes to suggest a return to the fire at the hut, a great light blazed up above the eastern slopes. Larger and larger it loomed, and the guides, seeking images in the unwonted, compared it to the great electric light in the square at Grenoble. We knew it for the morning star, and as at last it topped the crags—‘full she flared it lamping’ the Etançons—and illumined our grimy faces, we took it for an omen; and, silently, now all seven on one rope as some protection against the wind, we resumed our way.

The Meije has been described in detail, rock by



rock, too often, and with too disastrous an ill-success, so far as guiding others is concerned, for me to give more than a personal impression. As on the Ecrins, we had the best conditions and much help from the friends who had made all necessary steps on the two preceding days. The way is intricate, the climbing is continuously difficult, the rocks are always steep, the glimpses among the crags are always magnificent. But there is not, I think, one loose stone on the mountain, nor one moment of danger as distinct from difficulty. In such circumstances what can one reproduce of one's own experience save the indefinable and thrilling delight of achievement, the long reach, the wide straddle, the steady lift, the perfect union of hand and foot and eye, the easy accomplishment of the impossible, only a little less delightful because several places are for me impossible and require the long pull from some invisible assistant above? One such place every one of my predecessors will remember. A smooth tilted slab abuts against the mountain. In itself it is difficult, at any rate to the last man, for whom the rest of the party are probably too impatient to spare much time; but when once your hands are on the top you swing your left leg round and, with a gasp, seat yourself on the sharp edge. The effect is startling, for there, 7,500 feet below, is La Grave, now first and suddenly revealed. Your right leg hangs over the obstacle you

have surmounted, your left over nothing. In front rises the mountain with only the rope going up into vacancy to tell you that your companions have gone before. Here I sat shivering like a soul on the verge of eternity, listening to the grinding and scratching of boots above my head. At last a command, an attempt to obey it, I get my feet on the slab-edge, and grope for holds above; the command is reiterated, I plead for time, the rope tightens, I struggle and swim, the impatience of my immediate predecessor increases, a jerk, a plunge, a tug, and I have attained, panting, but not by my own skill of hand or foot.

Long before we reached the top the wind had disappeared, and 'set in heaven's third storey', we lay for an hour and a half, soothed with victory, and looking over all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. The passage of *les arêtes* which follows, tenfold more difficult than the Ecrins ridge, filled us with wonder at the daring and skill which first forced an ascent from La Grave, and affords opportunity for the display of every mountaineering virtue, including, when the party includes a photographer, that of patience. Three hours twenty-five minutes' climbing and two hours' halt had sufficed for the ascent to the Grand Pic. Two hours' climbing and ten minutes' halt took us thence to the Pic Central, and there we consumed another hour in delicious gazing. Then came a piece of thoroughly bad

mountaineering, which we hated at the time, of which we are even now thoroughly ashamed, and which we shall certainly repeat when at 'an early date' we repeat the expedition. The slope from the little col beyond the Pic Central on to the Tabuchet glacier is ice, uncompromisingly steep. The Dauphiné guides, too ready disciples, have learnt from the descent into the Brèche Zsigmondy the value of *abseilen*, and have fixed a loop on the last rocks above the slope. Through this loop the spare rope used on the Brèche is passed, and, the last man getting a good position on the rocks, the whole party descend, each grasping the spare rope with one hand, fending himself off the slope with his axe, and walking like a fly on so-called steps, mere scratches on the wall. The first man, with nothing to steady the bottom of the rope, grinds his hand against the ice until he skins it. The second—myself—the rope held against him, was in even worse case; while all the time the voice of Joseph above, 'Doucement, doucement, point de secousses,' made me wonder what would happen in the very probable event of the sharp shock of a slip, both to Joseph himself and to the exiguous cord on which three at least of us were hanging at once like a string of onions.

Space fails to describe the unsympathetic attitude of my companions when I showed them the backs of my hands, the exhilarating march of our now vic-

torious party over the glacier, Maximin's ferocious drinking-songs where we took off the rope and finished the provisions, and the ensuing mad race over stones and meadow with a final glissade down a slate quarry, and the last five minutes of perspiring haste up the little path into La Grave. Space fails also, alas ! to describe our family party on the South Aiguille d'Arves three days later, when our rope of seven was expanded into a rope of nine by the addition of M. M—H—'s wife and son. But space must be found to tell of M. Tairraz's champagne luncheon after the return from the last-named mountain, of how Maximin surpassed himself, and of how Joseph at last loosened his tongue and told us anecdotes of that strange beast 'mon monsieur'. There were the two brothers, one of whom, when he reached the Grand Pic, looked along the arête, 'et il a pleuré et son frère le consolait, et ils parlaient de sa mère.' Above all, there was the man, 'un monsieur très pesant,' who had been instructed in all circumstances to obey, 'for on the mountains with such tourists I must be obeyed,' to watch Joseph's feet, and to place his own in the same holds. The expedition was accomplished. And when we reached La Grave the gentleman hurried to the photographer's for some memento of his perils. 'What did you see?' said the photographer. 'Ah ! mon Dieu, il répondait, j'ai vu—mes pieds.'



An hour later a belated motor-car, rushing downwards to make up for lost time, bore us at break-neck speed down the Combe de Malaval, Maximin's songs still ringing through the clash and rattle ; and above and through the smell of the petrol came in the sweet damp evening air the heavy perfume of the lavender, the last recollection of ' The Scented Land '.

### III

## IN COUTTET'S GARDEN

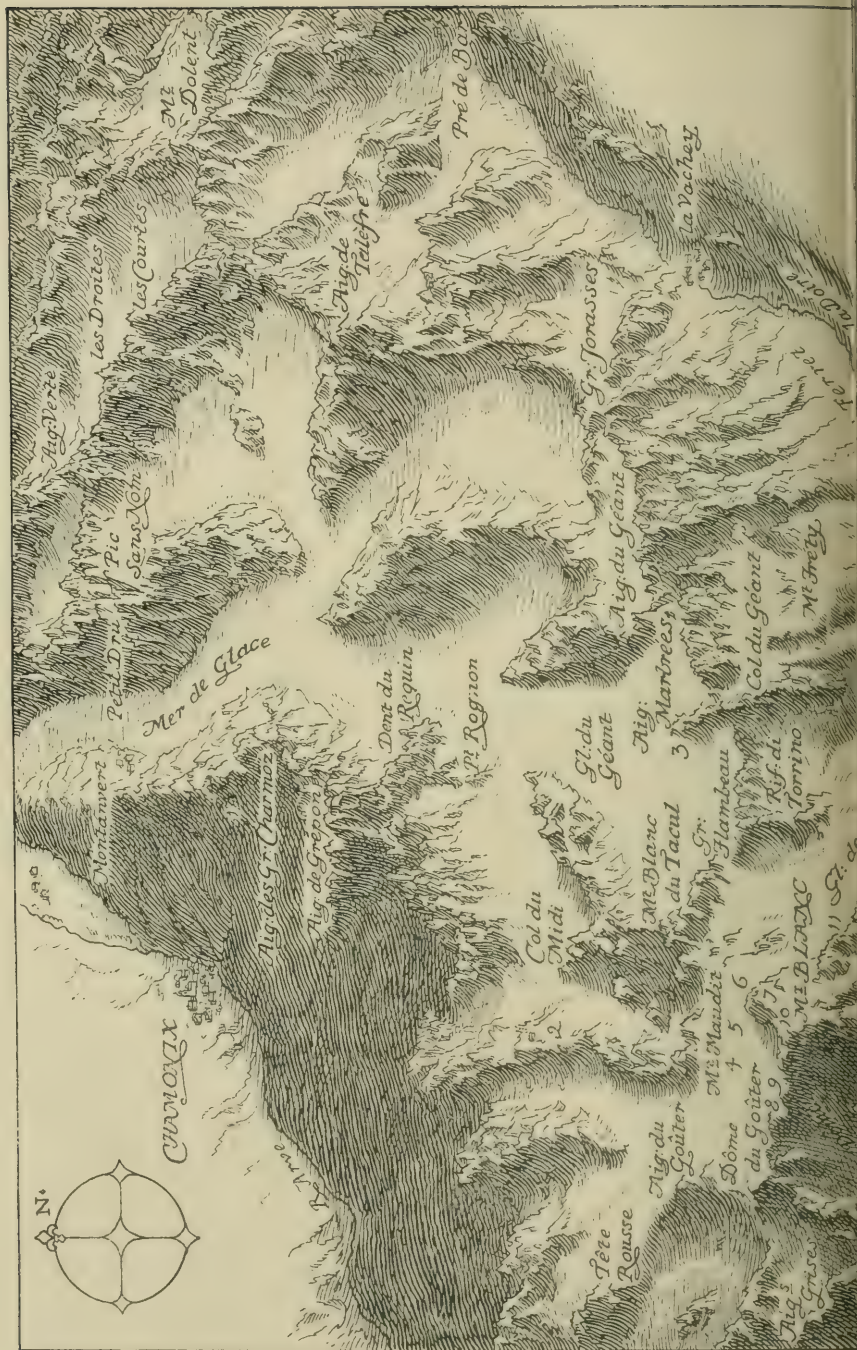
JUST as there is only one way for the mountaineer from Breuil to Zermatt, and that over the top of the Matterhorn, so there is but one way for him from Dauphiné to Chamonix, and that by the mountains. The way is capable of variations. You can go from the Romanche valley to the Maurienne by the Col Lombard, or, reversing the original route, by the Col des Aiguilles d'Arves. From Modane to Pralognan you have the alternatives of the Dent Parrachée or of the less well known Péclet or Polset ; and when you have reached Val d'Isère, you have a threefold choice between the Rutor and the numerous peaks and passes which lead into the heads of Val Grisanche and Val de Rhêmes. By any of these you can come, after enduring a sufficiency of discomfort and hunger, to Courmayeur and to the best dinner in the Alps.

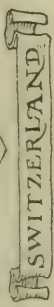
Unhappily for us this year, the matter of the Tarentaise was again perforce to be abandoned, and Grande Casse and Sassièrè and Mont Pourri were but Pisgah-sights ; and not only did our ill-fortune shut us out from their lower slopes. We saw their tops

as I had never seen them before, nor hope to see them again. All day we had changed, perspiring, from one train to another. All a summer's afternoon had we sat before the Montanvert, meekly seeking repose among the crowd—Pentecostal in its variety of tongues ; and from that Margate in the mountains looked on the most wonderful of Alpine views. Not the railway, now arrived only a few minutes' walk from the inn, not the hideous little station which is to be the terminus, built with excess of insolence in the immediate foreground, can stale or wither that first ecstasy when you round the hotel building and see the Great Jorasses once more ; and when the polytechnics and the polyglots depart, and with their departure the ominous heat of the day gives place to the chill of evening, the little band of the faithful seem in solitude, and the great vacant spaces of the Mer de Glace more solemn as the echoes of the cackle die away. As of old, the Montanvert by evening was a very different place from the Montanvert of midday. The dinner table reproduced with a difference the dinner table of fifteen years ago—the three Olympians of the guideless party, the old stagers (with their old guides in the annexe), the aspirant, as of old, made up the company. But they were not the same Olympians, the same old stagers, nor, alas ! the same aspirant as when Pilkington was Consul. *Quantum mutati ab illis.* And not only in



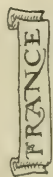




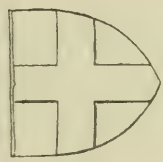
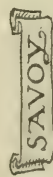


ME BLANC

from  
CHAMONIX  
to  
COURMAYEUR



Ancient



Modern

- |                           |                   |                                 |                           |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Glacier des Nautillons | 5. Le Corridor    | 9. Basses du Dromadaire         | 13. Rocher du Mont Blanc  |
| 2. Grands Mulets          | 6. Mûr de la Côte | 10. Observatory                 | 14. Aiguille Noire        |
| 3. La Vierge              | 7. Petits Mulets  | 11. Aiguille Blanche de Prétyet | 15. Glacier du Brouillard |
| 4. Grand Plateau          | 8. Vallot Hut     | 12. Col Infranchissable         | 16. Mont Brouillard       |



the substitution of new faces through which the old spirits looked, nor in the growth of the place and the increased length of the dinner, did it seem that the new Montanvert was not the old. Perhaps, as has been said before to the praisers of old days, it never was. The earthquake has shaken the foundations of the Little Dru and knocked the top off the Pic sans Nom, and in less material things the crowds of the daytime have at last affected the ethos of the place, and what used to be a club-room has fallen to the level of a caravanseraï, not without substantial results upon the bill.

So, with the depression of the early morning upon us, we meditated as we slowly ascended the Glacier du Géant. Even the track was changed, and this year swings nearer to the Talèfre on one hand and the Petit Rognon on the other than ever in my remembrance. But the eternal freshness of the snow before us and the peaks on either hand were unchanged, and in the dim uncertain dawn this was—

The glimmering verge of Heaven, and these,  
The columns of the heavenly palaces.

It was a day of ill-luck. Parties forced the Charmoz and the Grépon ; others the Réquin ; those who had slept at the Géant hut and made an early start secured the Aiguille. But all these successes were painfully achieved, and in at least one case the party



spent the following night on the glacier. For us the 'sweeping of the wind' and 'eternal rain' of the poem were not far distant, and, just where the way to the Aiguille du Géant leaves the track to the pass, the tempest smote us. In the gaps of the clouds we could see a party descending on the great slab, and it was irritating not to follow. 'With a little more youth and a little more courage,' I said, 'we might attempt it.' 'Yes,' said Joseph, 'or a little more ignorance. Moi—père de famille; vous—père de famille; lui—' (with a jerk of his finger to his newly-married companion) 'futur. Descendons'. And we descended.

Mountaineers have had many opportunities for the contemplation of angry nature during 1908. But those opportunities seldom occur when one is at once 11,000 feet high and in perfect safety. Hence our twenty hours at the Rifugio di Torino are not to us a subject for regret. The finest panoramas of the Alps are those from the mountains which stand apart from the Pennines and give you concentrated rather than extensive vision, with some composed picture—the Zermatt mountains each with his character, or Mont Blanc with his satellites in majestic order round their king. Of such a view the Herbetet, and especially the glen below the glacier Grand Neiron, the steep slopes framing the view and directing the gaze, and the Meije, and especially

the upper slopes of the Tabuchet glacier, are the best examples. The views back from Mont Blanc or the Matterhorn have no reciprocal advantage. The glens, up or across which you look, are tangled. Peaks appear where you least expect them. The landscape has an air of coloured mystery such as is fitting to the delightful land which lies beyond. No great spaces, no infinite depth of limpid ether, but a wild riot of dancing spears, rising from the empurpled depths, no one shape claiming pre-eminence, save only where the black mass of the Pourri and the mighty shapes of Dauphiné give the eye a welcome stay. Such a scene is the fit setting for storm. To-day Dauphiné was hidden, or only revealed fitfully below the cloud. A blackness almost palpable half overhung, half hid the Italian hills. The Crammont and the nameless heights above Val Ferret took on an unwonted importance in the absence of their rivals. Then the storm hesitated and broke back, and for an interval each Italian glen, Val Grisanche, Val de Rhêmes, Val Savaranche, the Cogne valley, displayed their whole form—the invisible clefts of the glens made apparent by the light shining on the upper slopes and sharply defining the darkness below—while over the Savaranche the range from beyond the Paradis to the Grivola gleamed with dangerous distinction. Then the whirlwind fell. Again the whole scene was blotted out, and again was revealed,

but this time lighted by lightning. It uncovered the deep places hidden among the hills, it played round Grivola and Herbetet; last it centred round the Paradis, and continuously, for a time which I dare not name, the great snow slope was brilliant, though the sun had gone.

We were a motley assembly to look on such a sight. All the afternoon came travellers, stirred to activity by the splendour of the preceding day; English, Italians, Germans, Austrians, French, and Dutch. And our companions and masters came from every Alpine country with names familiar in many an Alpine story—Croux and Ollier and Petitgaz and Brocherel from Courmayeur; Gentinetta and Perren and Chanton from the valleys of the twin Visps; Maurer from Grindelwald; Favre from Pralognan; Turc and Gaspard from the far-off Vénéon; and a yellow-bearded giant from remoter Tyrol hopelessly lost among so many talkers of French and of Schweizer Deutsch. Among us all bustled the wonderful and indefatigable B. (I suppress his name, not because it ought not to live long in Alpine chronicle, but because I have never discovered how to spell it), good-tempered, good-mannered, like all his charming race of Franco-Italians, and providing, out of a minute kitchen, in a living room made to hold twenty comfortably, a four-course dinner for sixty hungry travellers.

Next morning broke, cheerless and grey with

snow. On the top of the pass we found a wilderness literally howling with the wind penned between the Aiguilles Marbrées and the Flambeaux. The deep track of yesterday was gone, though it had been retraced three-quarters of an hour before by three large parties. One of the Brocherels, the Tyrolese, and their Herr stood there disconsolately. The curse of Babel was upon them, and we learnt by shouting that Brocherel was expecting with impatience the arrival of our French-speaking guides. In one long string, to keep direction, with Casimir leading and Brocherel yelling instructions from the rear, we hurried down, and in a very few minutes had reached the séracs, and, by good luck, rain instead of the blinding, bewildering cloud of snow.

Experiences such as this are meet to be endured, at reasonable intervals, in every mountaineering career, and happy is he for whom the fates select such a highway as the Col du Géant as the testing-ground. Here the sharp sting of the wind and flurry of the snow are only bracing. But you can well picture similar moments on the Grand Plateau, or the great trough between the Aiguille du Goûter and the Dôme, or the wastes of the Ewig Schneefeld. And even on the Col du Géant, where the possibilities of error are limited, it is not pleasant to think of a party reaching the top of the séracs, finding it impossible, as it would be in a storm of only a very



slightly larger extent and violence, to hit the top of the track and forced to return over an obliterated trail to the Col. Resolution and common sense ought in so comparatively confined an area to find some way out. But resolution bends before the gale and common sense freezes into numbness until it is as cold as despair. Even as it was, a man with a great mountaineering name was found just below the Col drawing patterns aimlessly in the snow and waiting for something to turn up. The determination 'not to let the weather bluff us', as I have heard a distinguished guideless climber express it, is a necessary element for a successful season. But this is a game in which the other party may call on you to show your hand at any moment and the stakes are high.

All this had we endured, so little had we achieved, and we basked in Couttet's Garden under an untroubled sky. But now the mountains were fast bound in ice. The usual lamentation went up, 'Nothing high will go for the rest of the season,' and the parties of the day before were now departing for the plains. Before we went we sunned ourselves yet a little, soothed into languor by the soft valley air, and devoted ourselves to the most alluring form of climbing—that which accomplishes itself in memory and anticipation. What spot in all the Alps affords so fine an opportunity? There are Grépon and Charmoz—still the last word of modern

mountaineering, though that word, since spoken, has found many echoes and recurs in many different tones—there is the infinite vastness of the Great White Mountain himself ; and both the rocks and snow so overhang you that, with the hotel telescope, you can bring the joys of many summers into the garden and tremble once more on that terrible ridge or rush once more down those glistening slopes. You have again the tumultuous joys and the unbroken calms with which you first there battled and achieved, and as friendships, never to be broken, and failures, now long melted into delights, surge up and choke you, ‘ hopes and aims long lost ’ stand round the ‘ mountains ’ side by side—

Like tombs of pilgrims that have died  
About the Holy Sepulchre.

At the end of the garden, too, is the presentment, half grim, half humorous, as we knew him in life, of the last of the old guard, scarcely great among the pioneers, and yet to the middle generation the embodiment of early adventure among the European Alps. With his saving common sense, his rich love of life in action, his comradeship, he calls us back from any morbid imaginings of middle age with the Saxon battlecry, the true spirit in which to meet fatigue and storm, ‘ Thought shall be the harder, Heart the keener, Mood the more, as our Might lessens.’

1909

I

‘BEHIND THE SCENES’

‘MAN,’ said Joseph, who is fond of gaining a few moments’ ease by the utterance of sententious platitudes, ‘man proposes, but ——’

I observed that the truth of the observation did not console me for the fact that another human endeavour was about to fail. ‘Ah,’ he replied, ‘I do not complain that another should dispose. It is, however, wearisome that, with so large a choice, he should always dispose thus,’ and as another icy gust cut short my answer, buckling up our harness more tightly against the storm, we took the way of the valley.

Man had proposed many a thing this summer that was to be blown to shreds by howling wind or drowned in rain. Above all, as winter lingered on in the lap of summer, it seemed that August must bring the usual conditions of July, and that those great snow expeditions, which become impossible when the August sun has turned the pleasant approaches of the mountains into battlements of ice,

might remain possible up to an abnormal date. Thus many a party, planning their campaign, thought of the great southern routes up Mont Blanc, of the Brenva, the Innominata ridge, the Brouillard, and the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, and thus there was a probability of the assembly of a large body of English climbers at Courmayeur. Alas for the vanity of human wishes ! These great walls must go through many processes before we flies can walk safely upon them. There must be some days of continuous sunshine to bind their surfaces to their main structure, while still leaving them friendly, firm enough for the boot and not so hard as to need the heavy stroke of the axe. Above all, we must await steady weather, hot misty noondays and sharp bright nights, to give us the promise that, once in that great labyrinth, nature will not close her hand upon us until we have emerged on the tablelands which look towards the north.

On these hopes and plans there came the climbing season of 1909. No words of vituperation can add an adjective to that. ' The worst season since 1860 ' says a great authority. ' The worst season since 1896 ' say those whose memories do not carry back as far as those of ancients : a season of successive disappointments, always tempting you, always denying you ; always exacting the hut-tramp and sometimes the treadmill on the morning snow slope ;



always driving you from the reward with the cursing of the awakened wind and the instant peril of the thunder; and sometimes, worst insult of all, assuming a smiling face, when you are definitely worsted, and sunning you home with the reflection that, with a little more perseverance, you would have attained.

Thus, had we known it, there was need for all Joseph's natural philosophy, as we came to Courmayeur. Yet never did the morning suit our mood more merrily. All round the western end of Mont Blanc the barometer rose, and each shower, as it descended, seemed the last. The great untidy ridges, the waste places heaped with stones which overhang the foothills, had caught and held the rainstorms, to soften their outlines, to embolden their crags, to enlarge and dignify. The eastern end of the chain sinks down only for a moment at the Ferret, to rise again in the slopes and heights of the Vélán and the Combin, and below you have the great space in the heavens above the ordered peace of the Vale of Aosta. But the western end is all a tangle and confusion. The glens run anywhither. The great mountains of the Central Alps are, for the most part, hidden, and those which make the boundary between the systems of the Isère and the Po, seen at so unusual an angle, put on new shapes. Indeed, between you and the nearest of them there is a long interval of





SWITZERLAND

General Map  
of the  
TARENTAISE  
with parts of the  
MAURIENNE  
and of the  
Province of  
AOSTA



FRANCE



SAVOY



E.H. New, 1911

uncertain water-sheds and twisting defiles. It is as though the main chain of the Alps had been made in the great workshop in a straight line and then bent between awful fingers to form the crescent rampart of Italy. At the bend the long line has crumpled and strained, and here have been piled the materials left over at the building of the world. It is like the ‘opera’ of an Italian cathedral, strewn with barriers of rock not needed for the great temple, beyond whose outer courts you are passing, and huge unfinished mountains, designed to fit into the scheme as seen from far, and make a foreground for the amplitude of iron wall and silver dome and minaret which is here hidden from you. To us it seemed the behind-the-scenes of nature, crude, harsh, meant as the preparation for some unseen spectacle.

This till you breast the last slopes of the Col de la Seigne ; there, shivering, we took up our journey, now in Italy, and the pageant began. The way is an old way, the path by which our predecessors ‘ante Agamemnona’ took their walks in the Alps, when as yet people walked round instead of over the high mountains. Time has multiplied the visitors to Chamonix a thousand-fold, and Courmayeur is a fashionable *villeggiatura*. But the ‘low-tour’ is no more frequented than of old, and the upper end of Val Vény is hardly changed in these fifty years. I doubt whether our predecessors had not the best



of it. The great wall of Mont Blanc runs along, seemingly invulnerable, until it sinks and turns northwards at the col which closes the Val Ferret. And it runs, not as on the French side, with great rolling downs of glacier and snow, sloping so far back at a uniform angle that the eye loses the sensation of height and distance, but riven with wild fall of ice and rock, or deeply cleft with darkness, or wild with every fantastic shape of pinnacled splendour, or, at last, sublime and huge as the sheer cliff which shuts in the head of the Brenva Glacier. Beyond is the shining mass of the Grandes Jorasses ; beyond still are suggestions of an unending avenue of glory. Out came the sun, but did no more than temper the sharpness of the mountain air ; down the vale we moved to the tune of ' *Levavi oculos* ', only pausing by Our Lady of Healing to see again, through the pattern of waving trees, that silver stair above the silver door, the buttress of the Brenva—for us a Pisgah sight.

It is difficult to understand why Courmayeur is not more frequented by English people. The place itself has all the comfort of Chamonix without the Chamonix crowd. The climbing open to you is as varied as at Chamonix. The aiguilles round the Nantillons glacier and the peaks of the Argentière are, it is true, beyond your reach ; but you have to compensate you the Jorasses and his neighbours,

and many peaks, appanages of Chamonix by nature, are accessible from the Géant hut. Further, of the five great routes up Mont Blanc two must be, and one is more conveniently, taken from the Courmayeur side, while all the extraordinary routes imply a bivouac above the Val Vény or, possibly, a night at the Géant. On the other hand, Courmayeur has the defects of its qualities. You must not look for solitude ; the bray of the motor-horn by day, and by night ‘ the dancers dancing in tune ’, keep you wary and restless ; and three-day beards and torn garments seem incongruous amid all the fashion of North Italy. But fashion tolerates your oddities with a kindly eye, and, if you must sit down to meat with a crowd, there are some crowds with whom it is more pleasant to sit than others.

The chief objection to the place, however, is one which it shares with the immortal Mr. Bailey. ‘ He was born into a wale,’ said Mrs. Gamp, ‘ and he lived in a wale ; and he must take the consequences of sech a sitiuation.’ The village is very deep, and you wonder at the perversity which placed it, not where the streams from the twin valleys meet and where the whole immensity of their northern barrier is disclosed, but a mile and a half to the southward, where the shoulder of Mont Chétif shuts off the best half of the view. When you have spent an evening at the Géant you cease to wonder ; gradually the

glory fades from the hills and vales over which you look. The shade deepens over Entrèves, the meadows beyond towards the valley floor darken, La Saxe fades into the hollow of the hill ; only to the last, long after the world has put on evening, one patch of sunlight gleams and lights up Courmayeur.

By now it is cold at the Rifugio Torino. Still you can see belated travellers plodding up the slopes beyond Mont Fréty, and still, turning from them, your eye looks fearfully eastward and sees the conflict of the winds ; a mass of grey heavy cloud comes with the north wind over the ridge of Mont Maudit, and begins to roll down and curl along the upper snows of the Brenva. But ere it can settle the upward rushing south wind catches and tears it. All the spikes and bumps have each their wisp, and then hurl it away northwards again, and all is clear except for the driving, leaping snow. Then comes the south wind again with its burden, and the north repels it and drives it down into the abyss. Each screams against the other, and there seems something of the joy of battle in the scene. Suddenly, as the advancing night folds up the mountains with the vales, the noise is stilled. The sun gives his last display ; Mont Blanc glows from gold through amethyst to purple, the Aiguille du Géant catches fire, for an instant is a bar of molten metal and then is cold, and all is still. It is good for us to be here.

‘ *La nuit est claire,* ’ says M. Barieux, ‘ *mais il y a un peu de vent.* ’ The night is rich and thick and velvety, and, the col once left, the great bay of the upper Géant glacier gives so much shelter that the lantern burns steadily, though far off you can hear the wind booming with the regularity of minute guns. So quiet was the pace, so gentle the slope, both down round the Vierge and up to the Col du Midi, that I fell into that dreamless half-sleep which softens the toil of so many early climbs. My doze was broken by a voice asking for what point on the Tacul ridge we were to aim. I roused myself and looked about me. To the eastward the Dôme du Goûter was still a glimmering shape, hiding the risen sun, but westwards and northwards his reflected light made a background of pale but angry gold for a long array of black forms, helmeted and speared, beautiful as an army with banners. What new vision was this ? and it was some moments before I made out that I was looking across to the head of the Talèfre, and that the Courtes and Droites had in the uncertainty of dawn aligned themselves with the Nantillons peaks.

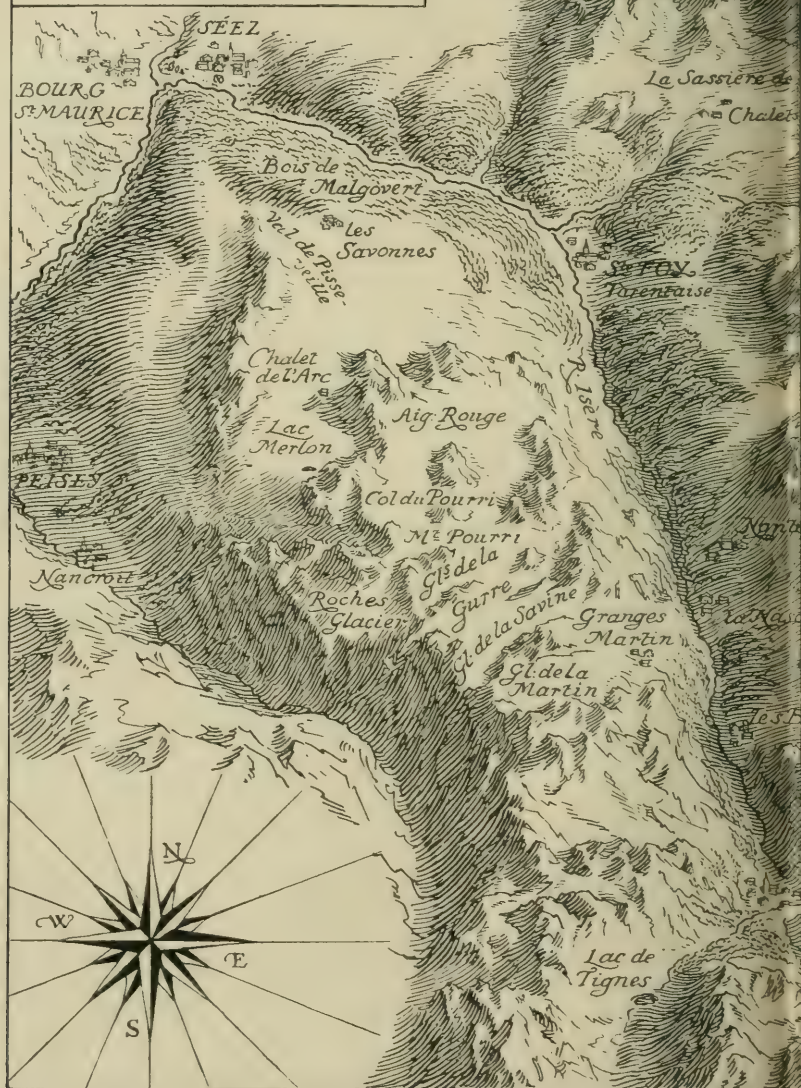
Our aim was to cross the ridges of the Tacul and the Maudit, so as to reach the Col de la Brenva, and finish the ascent of Mont Blanc by the Mur de la Côte—now, in spite of its length, a popular expedition.



We struck up diagonally across the face, aiming to hit the ridge a little to the left of a projecting rock very conspicuous on the arête. The snow was infamous, not soft, but deep and powdery. The schrund was large. Joseph built a ladder with the axes up its upper lip, and, with a shoulder, was soon at an anchorage above. I was awake enough to wonder how I was going to arrive without the shoulder when Casimir was kneeling on my head. I had a premonition of a crampon spike in my brain, and then he too landed successfully. My task was, as usual, simple and passive, and I soon found myself on the topmost axe, the wrong way up, and trying to pull the bottom axe out of its hole. This is an exercise compared to which that of cutting off the branch on which you are sitting is quite agreeable. However, it accomplished itself somehow, and we made on. It must have been when we reached the ridge that the chance of defeat became present to our minds. Certainly it was here that the wind first smote us. We turned from the peak, only a few hundred feet on our left, down into the little vallon at the foot of the Maudit, hoping for some shelter. But the slopes of the two mountains made a funnel through which the wind, pent up, beat us with redoubled vigour, and still unhalting we pressed on. At last, half-way up the Maudit, a sérac and the lip of a crevasse gave us enough protection. We took



# VAL d'ISÈRE VALGRISANCHE & VAL de RHÊME





RUITOR  
GLACIER

la  
Vedette

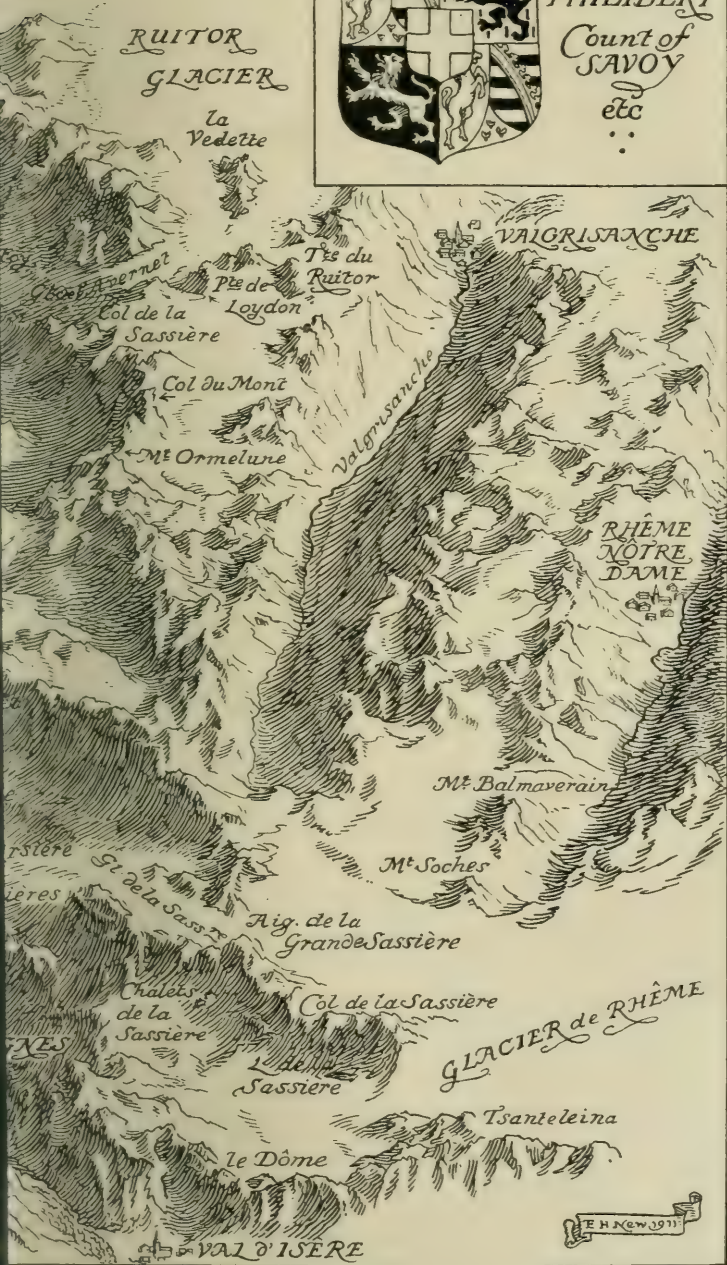


EMANUEL-  
PHILIBERT

Count of  
SAVOY

etc

..



THE NEW 1911





a long halt, for we had five and a half hours’ walking behind us, and we knew not how much before, only in front what even the restrained style of the *Climber’s Guide* calls ‘ a very steep snow-slope ’, and beyond the wild tumbling of the racing clouds, playing a mad leap-frog and somersault game down the pinnacles of Mont Maudit and back again.

It is a very steep snow-slope ; so steep, as the drifting powdery snow exaggerated its angle, that I cannot imagine how snow can lie at such an inclination ; axe and crampons must bite through to whatever beneath may be solid. In places a little hard ice gave work for the guides’ arms and for us a little breathing space. We changed ends often to relieve the leader, though both men stuck to it grimly, and at last a few feet of rock tuned us up, as we most wanted it. So gay were we that my companion sorrowed for the peak of Mont Maudit itself. But Joseph pointed upwards to the Mur de la Côte. This was not a day for trifles. Once more we hoped for some shelter in the descent to the head of the Corridor. Once more we were more than disappointed. From this point onwards the joy of the morning passed into unutterable toil. The shrieking wind beat us to our knees, sucked out our breath, shook us like naughty children, stilled an instant, and then struck us across the face with his infernal artillery, the flying scraps of ice and snow.

He tore my handkerchief from my head, and whirled it high up and then down towards Italy. But Joseph plodded on bitterly. Rage came upon me that I should have to walk so fast. I screamed at Casimir and jerked his rope. He jerked it back and went on. For an instant, no more, we halted at the Petits Mulets, and some one said a gloomy word about the time to come. Then still on, and suddenly there appeared to us a wooden post and rails, and behind it a living creature who beckoned to us ; we followed him down a spiral stair, and in a few moments were drinking tea in the buried Observatory below the summit of Mont Blanc.

We were glad of the welcome and the tea of the guardians. But for the former we could not have halted until we reached the concentrated beastliness of the Vallot hut ; indeed, but for the heart given by the latter, we should hardly have faced the Bosses ridge. But they promised us a fine track and less wind than in the Corridor. We found a track like a carriage road, and on the Grand Plateau, peace. As we drank tea again by the railway station at Chamonix and looked back lovingly on our antagonist, gently touched by the evening sun, and apparently only shaded now and then by quiet lazy clouds, it was incredible that our storm should still be raging there ; yet so it was.

## II

### ‘STEPPING WESTWARD’

‘THE word “impossible”,’ said the Abbé, ‘is not to be found in the French dictionary. A mule shall be brought.’

At the moment I was abashed, for, half-stripped, I had been removing the traces of the morning’s toil with the help of the village pump, and a beautiful lady from nowhere had just handed me a towel. It was soon evident that, whatever may be the case with the dictionary, the word is known in the valley, for the demand for a mule was, perforce, reduced to a request for an ass, and he, when he came, had two legs. All the beasts were trying to save the harvest from the approaching storm, but this porter, honest fellow, could be spared. We loaded him up with the guides’ sacks, the sleeping-bags, and the cook-machine, and sent him on the way. ‘We shan’t overtake him before we reach the chalet,’ said the guides, ‘but we can track the way he has gone, and he can stand in the door and shout if night come upon us.’

So we turned to lunch in the Presbytery. ‘I will introduce you,’ said the Abbé, ‘to some Italian ladies



of my acquaintance,' and I found myself still more embarrassed by the presence of the lady of the pump. Over the coffee the Abbé became dithyrambic; puffing out his cheeks over his huge pipe, he said, 'Ah, my children, are we not all brothers? Here we are from Italy, from France, from England. What need have we of frontiers? What purpose serve those carabinieri up the glen with whom you are to sleep? From what do they protect us? Poor fellows, they know no better.'

We sat long over the coffee, for we had sweated all a hot morning up that delightful valley. As valleys should, it had narrowed at its mouth, and opened out at our advance, filling us with wonder and delight, as its path turned aimlessly from bank to bank, beside a stream which, as Stevenson would have admitted, knows the true business of a brook, being now a mountain torrent, roaring in a gorge, and now an English trout-stream rippling over a gravel-bed under the shade of Italian trees, and now a young river, flowing with steady force, and now just a water, fit for the women of the hamlets to wash the family linen. Above the one bank there rise the great black precipices which give the valley what little fame it has. And at the end lies the way to France, with our peak for the morrow barely visible, we thought, and infinitely distant.

The thought of the distance drove us forth at last,

and we, or rather the guides, shouldered our packs. We said good-bye to our priest and his company, and wondered what sort of reception we should find from the men of blood ; and, as we turned the first corner, half a mile from the village, there sat our porter. ‘Why are you sitting here?’ we asked. ‘Are the packs too heavy?’ ‘No, but I have never been higher up than this.’ We were still strange to the humours of that inconsequent and pleasant land, and these tidings dismayed me a little ; we knew not so much as the name of the huts which we sought, and only this of their direction, that they lay at the foot of an invisible mountain. But no one could be out of spirits in those upper glens. Everything that men look for in the hills is there. Far-spreading meadows, a rushing stream, a roaring cataract, and just when we were thirsty—milk. Two aged men came slowly forth from a curious eyrie of a cow-stable bearing us huge bowls foaming with the new-born food of the gods. ‘Of what nation are you? We know that you are not of our country, for we cannot understand your patois.’ We satisfied them, drank, and questioned them. ‘Thus and thus must you go,’ they said with gentle courtesy, ‘but we cannot tell you how far it is, for we never went further up the glen than this.’ Unwillingly again we moved, and, just as I began to think how pleasant a night in the open would be, we turned the summit of

a hillock, and saw the place where we shall both make our hermitage.

The valley opens out again, deeply cleft by the stream. A hundred cows graze on the further bank, above you are steep slopes that make the morrow a mystery. At your hand are the hut of the watchers of the frontier, and two hospitable gentlemen in the panoply of Royal Carabiniers. So hospitable are they that when one, coming round the corner of the building, found me changing my shirt, he pressed upon my acceptance no less distinguished a garment than his own beautiful blue pantaloons with a red stripe. Alas, that my modesty and my deficiency of inches should have compelled me to refuse! Here they spend a week at a time, being relieved from the barracks in the main valley. They find their stay a little dull, for though I suppose that they would stop smugglers or poachers, if they came, the duty of so doing rests with the doganieri, or the gardes-chasse. 'Sometimes some one wants to take a photograph and then I stop him. Otherwise there is not much to do.' Add that French is the language of the valley, and that they can only speak Italian—the leading man coming from near Rome—and you can picture a somewhat dreary week of duty. Add one more trait—that they would take neither silver nor wine nor food for their hospitality (and wine offered to doganieri on other lonely passes was always re-

jected), and you get a new light on the sense of duty of the Italian and his view of strangers. May Zeus, the friend of the stranger, look upon them kindly.

Our little peak of the morning is like other little peaks, delightful or tedious, as you bring to it a light heart or a heavy one ; or, perhaps, the seat of the passions lies lower down near the place of the process of digestion. We brought to it at least expectancy ; but nothing had prepared us for what we were to see. The Pennines are huddled and undistinguished ; Mont Blanc stands more up to his full stature seen from a few miles either east or west ; the Grivola is more graceful from the north. But look out in front, past our goal the Pourri, from here tremendous, past the black wall of the Grande Casse, and the graceful pyramid of the Grande Motte, over the Mont Isèran, that birth-place of many waters, over a new heaven and a new earth ; through the gap comes the jagged edge of the Levanna, and there ceases our power to call these apparitions by their names. Like the waves of the sea in number, their heights set apart by the light wisps of cloud caught in their vales, they stretch out for ever, heights and vales through which we shall travel ' these many summers in a sea of glory ', hills of promise and vales of mystery, ' lands indiscoverable in the unheard-of west,' as strange to us as the Pacific to Cortez, as alluring as the sunset to Ulysses.



I found the church-town of Val d'Isère gloomy and savage after the varied richness of the Italian glens; the next afternoon was heavy with thunder, and I was glad when we made us boun for the Pourri. Further down the river the hill-side is again clothed with forest and above it with clinging undergrowth, and through it we pushed our way hastily as the storm approached. We were not quick enough, the rain caught us half-an-hour before we reached the Granges Martin, and we arrived at the chalet drenched both from without and from within. The chalets stand on a hillock, say 2,000 feet above the valley floor, in a sea of farm-yard filth; behind stretches a green meadow, and all around wanders every conceivable kind of domestic animal. The interior differs only from the common type by the fact that most of the population sleep in an inner room—whose ceiling makes a hay-loft—containing one ordinary bed (for grandmamma and grandpapa) and one enormous cupboard which, when opened, discloses a huge recess where papa and mamma, Elmira, Honoria, and the baby take their rest. A superfluous woman sleeps in the outer room, and somewhere about the premises are stowed a hind and a boy. We pulled enough hay from the loft to keep off the damp from the floor of beaten earth, and spread our sleeping-bags thereon. Joseph and the porter, a very dashing young man from Val

d’Isère, climbed into the loft ; Casimir chose the floor, and all was ready for the night.

Before that, however, was to come the best part of the entertainment. As the great pot boiled gently, the men talked in that steady flow of racy trivialities which is of the soil. You should always travel with French guides in these regions. Not only do they adapt themselves far more easily than the Teuton with his ever-homing soul, but their quick minds find an interest in the novel, their ease of manner and courtesy make you friends wherever you go, and their insatiable curiosity as to the life of man and the lives of beasts open for you that heavily-barred door—the peasant’s heart. On such occasions Joseph, who delights in anything young, pets the children and the calves and the little pigs, and Casimir, a traveller in grain, sucks out the history and the economy of the valley, the system of land-holding, the secrets of the cheese, the prices of the market. ‘I wondered as we drove down the valley,’ he began, ‘why you don’t grow potatoes. You seem to manage barley ;’ and so the ball was set rolling. Then, after that subject was exhausted, the porter began the wonderful epos of the valley ; how he and his father and other bold spirits made their way in winter into the head of Val Savaranche, not having the fear of Victor Emmanuel III before their eyes, and pursued his Majesty’s bucks ; of how there came upon them

his Majesty's guardians of the chase and bound them with ropes, and, as they lay there in the snow, how he with superhuman strength and agility freed himself and his father and others all but one. Then came the wild pursuit and flight across the head of Val de Rhêmes until he found himself twenty-four hours later alone in the wilderness of the head of Val Grisanche and, not daring in his loneliness and hunger to face another pass, threw himself on the mercy of the carabinieri there, and was kindly entreated and so came home again. But he who was left bound was carried down to Aosta and was hardly freed by the influence of a mighty man there, his cousin, and by a great sum of money.

One failure is very like another, and the tale of the Pourri is soon told. We started at 6.45, between showers, and coasted round the eastern slopes of the mountain towards a very prominent grassy buttress on whose north-eastern end stands a stoneman; struck the buttress to the left or westward of this signal, and worked upwards over stones, moraine, and glacier until almost on the col to the south of the highest peak. We thought the mountain was within our reach when a fresh storm came upon us. For a few moments we hesitated to commit ourselves to the arête, evidently the playground of the lightning. A great flash came from the cloud before us; still we waited, and then rolling and crashing round

the crags came a new clap and a new flash of fire, and then another and another. We turned and fled, and all too soon were arguing far down below on the meadows with an aged herd as to the proper place to cross the Isère. 'Take the upper bridge,' he said; 'you will certainly break your necks trying to find the lower, or you will fall from it into the Isère.' 'Can the chamois pass?' said Joseph, 'Ah! we are the brothers of chamois,' and down we went the most disgusting slide, half watercourse, half nut wood, to the terrible bridge, with the old man's cry in our ears, 'Ah, do yourselves no mischief; many a one has taken a hurt there.'

The afternoon was too beautiful to make us happy, but no one could remain sulky in Ste-Foy. Many an inn in these western valleys is nothing but a place to bury strangers in. The 'Isèran, Chez Arnaud' will always be a pleasant memory. The enormous landlady, the bustling, sharp-faced serving-maid, both coiffed with the tarnished gold of the local head-dress, crumpled up behind into a crown and cut in a widow's peak in front; the cool little room, looking over the lower valley of the Isère; the dinner, the balcony, and the calm of evening; '*sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.*'



### III

## THE FREEDOM OF THE COUNTRY

AN umbrella is always a ridiculous object ; five umbrellas in a row were too much for the gravity of the landlady of the inn at Ste-Foy. ‘ You are going up in the rain, on foot, to sleep in hay, and drink milk ’ (with a burst of laughter at each comma). ‘ If I travelled, it would be in my carriage, lolling back and dry, with a good dinner at the end of the day.’ ‘ Well, madame,’ said Joseph, ‘ your figure is perhaps more suitable for such an exercise. We have on our mountains at home places through which you couldn’t squeeze yourself.’ She laughed the more at this delicate banter, and the procession moved on.

In heavy cloud the scenery of the Sassi re de Ste-Foy glen is rather Scotch or Welsh than Alpine. The chalets of the alp lie at the end of a little marshy plain, girt in by the spurs of many mountains. From the north a torrent comes to you from a deep black gorge in which ascends the way to the Col du Petit. From the east come many streams, draining the glen of the Avernet, the slopes of the Loydon, and other nameless glaciers and mountain recesses. We

## *The Freedom of the Country* 77

were puzzled as to our way for the morning. ‘Ball,’ with discretion, describes the Avernet ravine as that ‘in which flow the two central torrents seen from the chalets.’ But it requires considerable mathematical ability to identify these torrents, and we gave it up. The people of the chalet begged us to leave the Avernet glen alone and take the gorge in front. ‘The glacier is very dangerous,’ they said; ‘but by the Col du Petit you can cross in any weather without trouble. Besides, if you try to find the Avernet you will probably go too far to the right and get over into Val Grisanche.’

The discussion was long, and the oldest inhabitant was very emphatic; but as the clouds were still all round us when we sought the great barn of last year’s hay, it seemed to me of merely academic interest, and I was still in doubt when the guides turned us into the night. ‘Which way shall we try?’ said the guides, as we came to the end of the marsh. We set our teeth and pointed into the fog on the right, where for a moment on the previous evening we had seen the setting sun gleam on to the snout of a glacier.

It is hard to give reasons for the ascent of particular mountains. Some we take for their fame, and some for their obscurity; some for their rock ridges, some for their ice slopes; some for their ease, and some for their difficulty. But very few people go up

very few mountains for the view alone, and it is to be hoped that they have more sense than to go up them in a fog. The Col de l'Avernet must always have an interest as perhaps the shortest and prettiest passage between the river-systems of the Isère and the Dora Baltea, but the Rutor would be a senseless grind were it not one of the best view-points in the Alps. So, as we tramped through the dripping alpen-rose and grass, I thought myself a fool. Only, as we went, we thought from time to time that the Pourri was struggling through the cloud, and wondered whether we were as silly as we seemed. Soon the view was forgotten in the interest of the way. We kept above the bed of the torrent on the true right-hand slope, striking the southernmost of the two bays into which the Avernet glacier is divided (as shown on the 1/100,000 French map) only when the steepness of the slope compelled us. Here we halted for breakfast and turned to look on the land we were leaving. All the world below was hidden in rich grey masses of cloud, so level and solid that you might fancy that you could walk on them. Above this sea, serene and alone, stood the Pourri, and beyond the mountains of Dauphiné, the Glacier Blanc on the Ecrins gleaming in the sun, the deep gash of the Brèche (there is only one Brèche—that of the Meije, just as there is only one Horn—that of the meadows, the Matterhorn) revealing darkness. We took but

## *The Freedom of the Country* 79

a step or two on the glacier, and, finding ice, forced our way on to the rocks again and followed them until but a few feet from the col, finishing the ascent by a gentle slope of snow. Here we had a pleasant surprise. The French map shows a barrier extending across the head of the Avernet glacier from the Pointe de Loydon to the rock called Les Vedettes, so that we had anticipated that, to reach the great southern bay of the Rutor glacier, it would be necessary either to cross this ridge or to make a long détour round the north of Les Vedettes. Fortunately the barrier does not exist, and you can reach the nearly level basin of the upper Rutor by simply walking with your hands in your pockets between the Vedettes and the Loydon. There are so many black points round the edge of the glacier that it needed a council of war to identify the Tête du Rutor; but when you have found the mountain your work is done. Elated at our luck, we almost rushed across the snow, making straight for the tiny saddle between the two heads of the mountain, floundered for a minute or two in loose snow by the saddle, and scrambled up the final rocks of the lower or southern summit. Then back along the eastern face, still so much excited that, though we all took different ways, we all missed the true top and had to traverse back again to find it, and in the course of a twenty minutes' scramble ascended it from every



point of the compass. We were panting when we found a little resting-place, sheltered both from wind and sun, on the north of the true summit, where we might eat and gaze.

With many of those who look down from Mont Blanc upon these gentle Rutor slopes they may escape notice among the riot of magnificence rising beyond them on either hand. 'The light fire in the veins of a boy' leaps at the majestic Verte; but to the more sober mind of the wanderer the desire comes strongly to reverse the position and see the monarch from the steps of the throne. At last the time had come. The merciful mists of morning still held back the mountains of the east. Mont Blanc alone held the heavens. Such moments come with an emotion which is physical and shakes you, purging with wonder and delight. The details are blurred with splendour. Only to the man renewed in body and in spirit with the mountain airs, stretched on the edge of the great aerial space, charged with colour and light, and straining through the seen and the half-seen, there comes a consciousness of the great communion of the world.

The glory had not faded when we moved. In any other part of the Alps the glen of the Rutor to La Thuille would be the resort of thousands. Some further beauty than we now find in the sleepy cow-pastures at the edge of the glacier has long since

vanished with the draining of the Rutor lake. But the glen below has no equal in the central chain of Europe. From top to bottom one deep waving mass of greenery is split and lightened by innumerable bars and flashes of gleaming silver, waterfalls of every kind of loveliness, and further down still, when you would think the stream would be weary with his leaps and rushes, more waterfalls still, but these secret in their splendour; one such we found suddenly in a little clearing of the forest, the river springing from behind a great grey rock in a spray as much air as water, and plunging once more into the obscurity of a shaded whirling pool, a place for the discreet gambols of the nymph of the torrent or the more terrible delight of the huntress-goddess.

So ended, at La Thuille, an odious place of flies and motor-cars, our dash through the Tarentaise. We came back 'foiled circuitous wanderers', for our objective, the summit of the Pourri, had not been attained. But we brought back something of more price than mountain-tops—the freedom of the country. The pioneers of the Alps slept in chalets and cow-sheds because they had to; then arose a race which bedevilled every glen with a club-hut, each nicely furnished with a camp-bed and cooking things. Then came the hut-haunter, an amiable animal with a passion for sunsets and midnight

melody. He makes the night hideous with the preparation of meals, he befouls the foreground, he strews the slopes with tins, and when you leave, in the misery of 2 o'clock a.m., he snores at you from his blankets. There are necessary huts, which for the most part afford a useful discipline for the temper. But henceforth the wise man, if he cannot find a chalet-hotel or a *bewirthschaftet* hut, such as the Géant or the Bétemps or Concordia, must take to chalets and mountains below 13,000 feet. Incidentally he will cease to be an automatic machine for walking up hills, and become a traveller. Travel means something more than covering the ground. Its art in the Alps must be to find the best way to the next valley; but that art would be too easy if there were no maps to mislead and no peasants to misdirect you, and it is in the misdirection of the peasant and his eternal task, as revealed to you, that the fun lies. We shall perish, our feet too gouty for the mountain path, our stomachs too delicate for the mountain fare; but he shall endure, and year by year his tale of cheese shall be painfully completed; year by year, as Michaelmas comes, shall he and flocks and cheeses descend into the valley; year by year, as the melted snows come down, shall he again seek the upper pastures and renew the secular strife with nature—'and we not there.'

There are those who complain of chalet dirt. It is, however, a good honest dirt. The exteriors of sheds which are entered twice a day by fifty cows need no description ; but they are no whit worse than the approach to the Mütthorn hut or the immediate surroundings of the upper hut on the Swiss side of the Matterhorn. As for the interior of the living room, its condition varies with the personal habits of the people. Take Pré-de-Bar in the Val Ferret as an example. It is described in M. Kurz's book as 'wretched' ; it is a degree more comfortable than the Granges Martin (probably because the climate is too cold for pigs) and several degrees less so than our quarters at La Sassiére, where the herds bring their wives and families and where the rooms have wooden floors. The floor is of beaten earth, the beds are of hay ; the fire, always smouldering, smokes the rafters and gives an air of gloom. But through all blows the free wind ; the drinking-cups and the sacred implements of the cheese-making are spotless ; the stream is a washpot, continually renewed. Here day by day and twice a day the cows come down from the sweet pasture up towards the Col Ferret, and each, seeking her place but complaining of the enforced abstinence from further food, is fastened in the long sheds. As you lie on the roof you hear the pleasant trickle of the milk in the pail, and, as the pails fill, a boy bears their contents in



a wooden bucket to the great copper cauldron by the fire. It pours down with a gurgle through a bunch of cane, acting as a rough filter, until at last the milkers' work is done. Then begins the sacred rite—the rennet is plunged into the milk, the spell works, and, with alternate simmerings and stirrings with a huge pole garnished with wooden spikes, the divine moment comes. Holding a coarse cloth, the cheese-maker plunges his arms into the cauldron and rises bearing a mass of broken whity stuff; he carries it to the shelf, places it in the press and fastens it, and another cheese is born, not yet for use, for many anointings with salt and much turning and long waiting must follow before those tasteless fragments are the firm delicious substance that we know. Not then, however, are the last gifts taken from that mysterious fluid. For more hours must the cheese-man labour, on the lesser cheese, the séracs, the butter, all the by-products of the cauldron, before, towards sunset (for this was the afternoon's milking), he can sit in the door of the hut and, with the last rays of light, read to the less instructed herds some story (it was the sad tale of Adowa), on which they hung with the eagerness of children. As we reached the Alp one morning the seventy-sixth cheese was carried to the cheese-cellar; as we left it the next afternoon the milk for the seventy-eighth awaited the rennet. All one long summer's day we

## *The Freedom of the Country* 85

had assisted at a mountain Georgic, and on the next, as we looked back from the slopes of the Mont Dolent, our eyes had often been lowered from the mountains of Cogne to the green pastures of the Ferret dotted with the slow-moving cows, the life-givers of those beloved dales.

1910

I

THE PATH OF AUTOLYCUS

ZERMATT at Whitsuntide gave us some pale presage of what the mountains were to be in August. It was not that snow lay everywhere ; that may well be the fruit of a single storm of spring. But it was the depth and consistency of the snow that astonished. You could walk up the course of the Gorner-grat railway between the Alp and the Haus, using the tops of the electricity poles as a balustrade, and taking every care that as you stumbled the wires didn't hit you in the face. But you could not follow all the way to the Haus itself, for fear of the avalanches which fell hourly from the bluff at the corner. The Gorner séracs were smothered in deep good snow, on which you could walk without cutting a step. The little path from the glacier to behind the Riffelhorn was a painful ice-slope. The hill-side from the Alp to Findelen was closed for heavy-gun practice for the white artillery, while every slope that faced the south was black, down to the frozen stream which divided it from its northward-facing neigh-

bour. The world had overslept itself, but every bird was in full song on the lower slopes, and higher up the cuckoo broke the oppressive silence, complaining savagely of reluctant summer. So still was it, so crisp and welcoming the pathway of enduring snow, that we made plans for the highest mountains, until in one night the Föhn wind blew, Hans led out the black heifer from her winter captivity, on the valley-floor the silver of the snowfield turned to the gold and azure of the meadow, and ‘all the world was in the sea’ of mud.

Higher up, the snow has never melted. All through August the Matterhorn seen from the south (when he could be seen at all) has glittered as a pyramid of ice. The Grivola has looked like its own picture. All the choices which the books give you to ‘Here leave the glacier for a rib of rock on the left’ have been denied you, for the glacier and its allies are everywhere indistinguishable. The great black western face of the Pourri, so conspicuous an object, seen over its northern shoulder, from any view-point in the western Pennines, is a delicately beautiful volute of snow—it is recorded as a curiosity that M. Puiseux found it so in 1879. There was no need for a single ladder in the Jonction, nor, for that matter, was there a single crevasse of any size between the Grands Mulets and the Pierre à l’Échelle. The lower slopes of stones which on so many mountains



intervene between the meadow or glacier and the true *aufstieg* were hidden under treacherous sliding snow, and every rock-ridge was hung with little cornices, which expanded on the summit-levels to huge pendent masses of ice and snow. Hence this year the ascent of the simplest mountain was a liberal education; and as the weather has maintained its evil reputation for uncertainty even until now, the great rock-mountains have defied assault either altogether or until an unusually late date, and when once conquered have immediately renewed their defences. The Dru had not been traversed by the 23rd of August. The other Aiguilles were accessible for only a brief space about the middle of that month. Accounts from Zermatt spoke in dreary tones of the Matterhorn. The great Dauphiné peaks were in like case. The three great Courmayeur specialists, Mr. Jones, Herr Pühn, and Herr Pfann, must perforce mature plans which even their rival daring and skill could bring to little.

With some premonition of these matters we chose again the way of Autolycus—to be snappers-up of unconsidered trifles; and the dripping of the rain on the roof of the Moutiers-Pralognan motor-car introduced us to the Alps. My recruit's conviction of the similarity of all Alpine valleys was shaken by the beauty of that of the Doron. In truth, however much the bleak tributaries of the Rhône may con-

ceal the separate characteristics of their glens from any eye but that of the lover, each lovely stream of the Tarentaise burbles with a different note and discloses a different picture, or invites the wanderer to seek in some upland lake or pasture an authentic sanctuary of new delight. Pralognan, as it possesses the only good hotel (excluding mountain inns) of the region, may fairly claim the title of metropolis. Far less Alpine than Val d'Isère—for the great containing wall of the Vanoise is too steep to disclose what lies beyond, and it is only a hint of snow that you get from the pastures round the village—with none of the romance of the Italian glens and none of the wild savagery of those which feed the Arc—the place has an ordered charm, set in green fields, adorned with the long-spiked blue thistle, hung round with woods, the meeting-place of many waters. The torrents of La Glière and the upper Doron meet here almost face to face, and the course of either will lead you to the recesses of the hills. That to the south may also lead you to much misery if you hope to follow it in one day to its natural conclusion, the summit of the Aiguille de Polset. The highest inhabited chalets in the glen, those of Ritort, are but 1,800 feet above the village and within an easy two and a half hours' walk. The books promise delusively another sleeping-place, that of Plancoulour, 800 feet beyond. But it is either ruined or deserted.

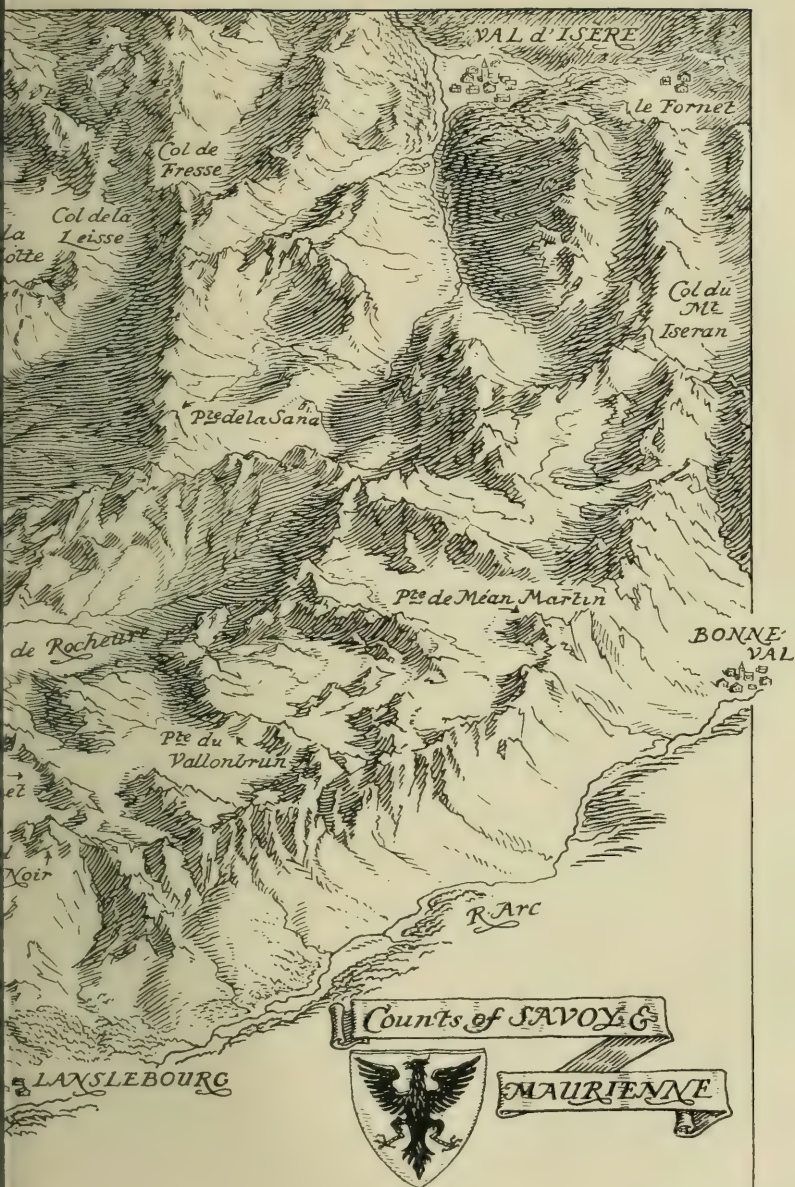
On the whole it was a kindness that the weather gave us when, after a happy night at Ritort, it drove us back to Pralognan, hardly dashed in spirit, for we had looked for much disappointment this year.

The chief excellence of Pralognan, however, from the mountaineer's point of view, is the Refuge Félix-Faure, on the Col de la Vanoise, perhaps the best-appointed and the best-kept of all the French chalet-hotels. The provision made by the French club for climbers varies between the most meagre—the mere shelter-hut of the Couvercle, or the hut on the Aiguille du Goûter—and the very best. And the policy is a sound one. If the hut is necessary, it is as well that it should be a good one, and the Col de la Vanoise is a starting-point whence the whole chain to the southward as well as to the northward can be explored. First of all, one turns naturally to the Grande Casse, the suzerain, if not the monarch, of the Tarentaise, the highest point between the western Pennines and the Dauphiné, with only the Grand Paradis and the Grivola to out-top it on the east. We found it a mere frolic. In ordinary years the guides like to take to screes or rocks on the right bank of the glacier, and are said to incur some peril thereby from falling stones. No practicable rocks were visible to us. We walked up the glacier with such deliberation as is proper for the first climb of









*waters of the ISÈRE & the ARC*



the season, nearer to the right than to the left bank, reached a snowy saddle, and, circling westwards and up a very steep slope, found it impossible to look back over the snowy summit, by reason of a prodigious cornice. There was a bitter wind, which frustrated an attempt to clear the snow from M. Helbronner's great cairn ; we could not eat nor scarcely stay to name the peaks marshalled for our inspection, and in an easy eight hours (which might be much shortened) were back at the hut. Never had I felt more confidence that we had met the weather in a friendly mood. It was cool and pleasant and clear, and the north wind was blowing. What more could be desired ? The little crowd of tourists up for the day from Pralognan chattered and admired the guides and the mountains. Joseph brushed out his beard and talked of Algeria. We slept, half listening, until the pleasant talk of the French people died away down the hill, the sun lowered, and the great trench of the Vanoise was again wrapt in grim cold, and then one gorgeous moment of illumination lit up in every shade, from crimson, fading again to dull white, the mighty altars at the evening hymn of their worshippers.

The morrow was another story. From the Col de la Vanoise to the Col de l'Arpont, at the foot of the south-west ridge of the Dent Parrachée, it is more than eight miles as the crow flies, and almost



the whole way lies over snowfield or glacier. Having failed to get into the proper strategical position for the peak by crossing the Polset to the south, it remained for us to attack now from the north. Alas ! the French map tempted us ; for we imagined the Glacier de l'Arpont to be as smooth and easy as the snowfields on the hither side of the Chasseforêt ridge as seen from the Grande Casse, and the vague engraving of the perfidious engineer who drew it lured us on. It seemed a small matter to walk over the snowfield, ascend and descend the Parrachée, and, returning a little on our tracks, cross the ridge of the Dôme de l'Arpont, and, as Casimir painted the prospect, hit some *vallon* which should bring us down to Ritort. Alas ! for the mass of winter's snow ; alas ! for London legs.

There was too much velvet in the night. The stars were too good to be true. Sirius assumed the air of the morning star, and flickered from silver to purple and back again, until the true Queen of the Morning in incomparable, but prophetic, splendour overwhelmed him with her light. She, too, ' touched to death with diviner eyes,' had gone down before the dawn, when we all woke from our dreamy march to find that it was very cold and that we were walking uphill. We ate and shivered and pushed on, then put on the rope, and Joseph, to prove its uses, at once fell head over heels into a crevasse. We were

now just on the summit ridge of the Dôme de Chasseforêt, the highest point of which, a mere hummock, lay perhaps three-quarters of an hour to the eastward. Here we crossed the track of parties coming to the Chasseforêt from the Refuge des Lacs. 'Where are you bound for?'—'To the Parrachée.' 'Ah, for to-morrow, perhaps?'—'No, for to-day.' 'My friends, you have much to work. But we will make you a good track to return by.'—'Not for me,' said Joseph; 'not one step back on this snow in the afternoon.' The alternative was the hill-side above Modane, and, as we went down the slope towards the Arpont glacier, I foresaw a 'bloody dukherippen'.

Indeed, here the troubles began. We were to exchange the gentle gradients hitherto ascended and descended for a traverse along the eastern face of the Arpont ridge. The snow was suddenly atrociously soft, deep, and unstable. We must turn corner after corner (as it seemed) under the heaven of a day that, as it lost its freshness, threatened to deprive us of our mountain. If we descended we wept for the loss of height; if we ascended we cursed between our sobs. Clouds closed down on the ridge behind us and loomed over the col in front. The guides, with that innocence of which nothing can cure them or our parents, began to talk of the chance of a chalet on the other side, in what they

fondly suppose to be an esoteric tongue, much as in my childhood my elders talked of powders. I took the means that never fails, and, half myself consenting, hinted at the loss of the peak. At once they were braced. We struck a rib of rock on the Parra-chée glacier at 8.20 (nearly seven hours from our start). There a huge breakfast restored us, distance vanished, and in a few moments Joseph was hewing great steps in a nasty couloir just below the arête, looking round at the rocks on either side every now and then with an 'Ah! would-you?' look, as the most sincere of guides do when they are blown. The ridge itself is steep, but not difficult. But every step was an excitement. The rocks were rotten and icy. The little intervening arêtes and couloirs of snow broke and slid, and disclosed ice. The wind howled, and, with some unnecessary consideration for the novice, we showed our sense of reverence by falling flat and embracing the mountain at appropriate intervals. But we were gay. Nature was at strife with us, and in vain.

At 11.40 we solemnly shook shivering hands on the top, looked down to the valley of the Arc for a quarter of an hour, and then turned to go. In an hour we were on the col again, and it was necessary to take counsel. To force the Arpont ridge in such weather and over such snow was unthinkable. But we could not bear, so early in the day, to surrender hope of

Pralognan and bed. We descended straight southwards to the head of the Fournache glen. There we rested, and then, girding ourselves, traversed round to hit the track to the Col d'Aussois. There are some who find no pleasure but under some undermined sérac or on the steep face of some unfriendly rock. Let me commend the unknown hill-side with the map kindly provided to mislead us by the French General Staff, with bed and bath and dinner at stake. Every contour is to be a Pisgah. Every rock may conceal the vale of humiliation and disclose a 2,000 feet descent. The party split, as weary parties do, each taking his own line. We swung round into the glen through which the waters of the Aussois torrent fall to the Arc. Below on a stretch of level meadow, green and inviting, was the Chalet du Fond. Some recreant pointed out its eligibility as a residence for the night. Not so the glowing Joseph; with burning words he urged us to the col. Guiding us over a trackless hill-side which he had never seen before, he led us straight to the proper outlet, high up on the right, though most of the party, professional as well as lay, sighed for the obvious col in front of us. We scrambled upwards over scree and through a curious vallon, a place for dead men's bones. Long glissades swept us down to the pastures, and long before darkness we were stretched on the upper meadows of Ritort



amid great herds of cattle and goats, drinking Homeric portions and assured of Pralognan. Two hours later, our measured tramp, as of an elated army, broke through the clatter of the knives and forks and plates at the Hôtel de la Grande Casse.

## II

### BETWEEN DORON AND DORA

To be really wet through is the most luxurious of sensations. Add a session of sweet and occasionally silent thought, a blanket for your garment, your naked toes against the fire-bars, your dripping garments playing a symphony on the top of the stove, and who shall ask more of fate or lament a lost mountain? So we reflected by the fireside of the inn of J. M. Richard at Entre Deux Eaux. The wretched mules might have had another story to tell of the rain hurled upon them by the Vanoise blast; poor beasts, they turned tail to the storm and quivered. We also thought differently when in the same garments we faced the same storm next morning. So unwilling were the muleteers to repeat their experiences of the previous day that it cost hours of time and a wilderness of threats and bribes to produce a start at all, and, once started, they needed constant watching to avoid a bolt back to Termignon. They were genuinely frightened, a state of mind difficult for the stranger to understand in those bound for a grass pass in August. As the day went on we came to a fuller comprehension and sympathy.

The Vallon de la Leisse is a place for satyrs to dance in. On the eastern side, before the ascent to the Col de Fresse begins, the mules were up to their bellies in the mingled snow and mud every few steps. Had the storm continued progress would have been impossible, and we began to attach a new meaning to those grim heaps of stones which, on some similar passes, are said to mark the last rest of belated travellers. As it was, it was a happy freak of the weather to stay its hand before the pass and let us make Val d'Isère only moderately damp, with only moderately regretful glances at our stately vanquisher the Grande Motte. Mr. Moris has put in a beautiful china bath with hot and cold water, and that in itself would console for anything. The band of the Chasseurs-à-Pied played every evening. The sun came out as we dodged the laughter of the Chasseurs on our way back from the bath.

There is much to say of Val d'Isère. But it cannot be said here. There is very little to say of the Aiguille de la Grande Sassièrè. It is very easy ; its final cone is very wearisome when deep in snow, it has one of the best panoramic views in the Alps, and it is approached or left through the greenest and most flower-strewn pastures of the greenest and most flowery valley in the Alps. It would be pleasant to cross it from Val de Rhêmes or Val Grisanche. If

you must go up and down on the French side, ascend by the Sassièrè pastures, wide and luminous in the morning light, and descend by Nant Cruet, rich in lilies of all kinds and edelweiss ; wind southwards round the hill-side by a green road and through forest by La Nasonde and Orsières, until immediately above Les Brevières, and then come down to the high road. But do not waste time, as we did, by following Baedeker's advice and seeking Chenal-Dessous and Dessus, for they are far off above the northern bank of the Nant. It is only fair to add that, going up and down in the Tarentaise, we found no book and no local information more helpful than our old friend in the red covers. All sensible people—that is all who spend the winter in making plans for the summer—use 'Ball' for the purpose. My copy, chopped up in little bits and defiled by many cowsheds, thrills me as I handle it with reminiscence and anticipation. But inns and paths change, and their changes must be recorded for the traveller. The wanderer in the Tarentaise will henceforth have his way made plain for him by the *Climber's Guide*, which is promised by Mr. Coolidge.

The dullest of us see visions at times, and our evening beside the Granges Martin passed to the tune of *Quam dilecta*. Almost as we left the floor of the valley the conical head of the Aiguille des Glaciers came over the hill-side. Then came the majesty of



Mont Blanc himself, and to the right the curious Géant, showing like a mere rock over the pastures above Ste Foy. Last of all there opened the heights above the Italian Val Ferret, the mighty Jorasses, long sought and once again this season to be denied to us, and then the Dolent. The Eastern Graians are better placed to view the chain in order, with the Peuteret ridge in its due proportion. Here, from the west of the Isère, the graceful curves of the Aiguille Blanche are masked, and the terrible Aiguille Noire all but loses herself against the ridge behind. But in compensation you look far into the recesses of the Miage and its attendant ice-streams. You can almost trace the Dôme route, and from this direction alone you can gaze, as we did anxiously, at the naked ribs of the Rocher du Mont Blanc, plainly articulated. The walk from Brevières is short and flowery, and would be beautiful without this revelation. Thus concluded it was worth a season's toil, a lifetime of Augusts in hot valleys and on cold ridges. Evening crept on. The sun died in crimson. All was cold, and the great mountain stiffened, with his rocks more distinct before they faded into darkness, 'the solemn slope of mighty limbs asleep;' and Joseph called us back to soup.

It was dark in the chalet. We talked over the history of the last year and the bad season. The old

man from Provence who keeps his sheep by summer on the pasture below the Col de la Leisse, driving them there painfully from the distant Midi, had lost fifty from a *tourmente* which drove them over a precipice. The guides knew him well, and sorrowed. He used to pasture by the Vénéon before that valley was closed for the *regazonnement*. And this year one may be afraid for winter feed for the cattle. The hay was only being cut now in late mid-August, and if the weather changed again it would not be carried dry. The porter, a most amiable gentleman from Les Brevières, remembered when no feed was obtainable and no price could be got at the great fair at Bourg St. Maurice, and he must drive his beasts over the Little St. Bernard, and keep them for the winter in the pastures of Aosta. He has a little *montagne* of his own at Orsières, on the other side of the valley. We could see the lights of his chalet. His wife was there that evening, having gone up to help his two boys tend the cows, after carrying hay all day in the sweet meadows by the river. He hoped that we would sleep there next time we came to Val d'Isère. Meanwhile the *patron* of the Alp, our host of last year, said little. He is a capitalist in cheese; buys from the Alps and sells to the merchants from Paris at the fair. The guides began to talk of the little blue cheese of their own valley, and he was alert at once. The talk took

a fresh turn, and I fell asleep, dreaming of Roquefort and Gruyère and the Mont Pourri.

We were off at 3.42. The night was brilliant but warm. As last year, we crossed by stones and grass below the snout of the glacier called by M. Paillon 'Glacier de la Martine', cut across the dry Glacier de la Savine, which was steep and icy enough to delay us a few minutes, and clambered on to the rock-rib which divides this latter glacier from the Glacier Sud de la Gurra. Up this rib we went with perfect ease, but in some fear of—among all things in the world—sheep, which, feeding high on the mountain, showed their resentment at our approach by kicking down stones. Then we, unwilling, drove them, equally unwilling, upwards until the rocks steepened and we could turn their flank. The rocks led us to the glacier. It was for the next part of the journey that my anxieties had been greatest, for the snow on the Sassièrè two days before had been infamous. But this snow was surprisingly good at first. Only where the slope steepens immediately below the Brèche it changed its character, and we wallowed, sometimes on all fours. To avoid it we inclined to our right and struck a rib of rock which would have led us to the arête a little to the north of the lowest point. We traversed, however, still further northwards and struck the arête in four hours' going from the start, half an hour of which perhaps had been

on the steep but easy rocks which we had just passed. Thence to the summit resembled a steeper but more amusing Dent Parrachée. Fast movement was impossible, for we were a large party, there was some ice on the rocks, and a cornice wherever one could perch itself. Joseph continually exhorted us to remember the mountain's name and beware of rotten rocks. But the ridge is not exceptionally rotten, and in fact the mountain owes its pleasant name to the evil constitution of the Aiguille Rouge, its northern neighbour, and not to its own misdeeds. After an hour's climb we halted to prepare for perils to come. But they came not, and at 9.42 we were on the summit. This year the top of the Pourri was a broad saddle of glistening snow, with a huge cornice overhanging on the eastern side; all down on the west snow stretched to join the topmost slopes of the Roches Glacier. The great northern arête was white. This arête is the natural path for the descent; *hoc erat in votis* all the winter. But we had already looked from the Sassiére and trembled at the cornices which fringed almost all its length. The wind was cold and we had far to travel. The snow was already bad. I shall never regret that we shrank from it.

There remained the question 'How else to get down?' Many years have passed since Mr. William Mathews wrote that 'the confusion of the nomen-



clature of the Tarentaise Alps is something astounding'. Since then the well-intentioned efforts of map-makers and of monographers have confounded confusion; and of all their victims the Pourri has suffered most. Further, its western side abounds in possible routes. Mr. Coolidge recommends his own route of 1878, when he descended the Roches Glacier for almost its whole length, as 'really the quickest and best way of reaching the summit of the Pourri'. A route, however, is quickest or otherwise according to the destination or point of departure of the way-farer; and we certainly did not want to descend by a route which, as we, erroneously, thought, would lead us into the head of Val de Peisey. In our view the best way up the Pourri, having regard to the accessibility of the night quarters, is that by the south arête (we can say so without a suspicion of an undue pride of fatherhood, since it was not we who invented it); the most sporting is certainly that by the north arête; the most convenient descent for travellers bound (as probably most travellers on the Pourri are) for Bourg St. Maurice is that originally taken in the ascent by Messrs. Mathews and Bonney in 1861, substituting, however, Professor Bonney's descent by the Pissevieille glen for that of their ascent as far as the Col du Pourri. By this route we gained Bourg St. Maurice in three hours twenty-three minutes' actual walking from the top of the

Pourri; and this time might be much reduced by a party who really wanted to hurry.

We had still several puzzles to solve, however, before we embarked upon it—puzzles which are now dissolved by Mr. W. A. Brigg's article in the number of the *Alpine Journal* for August 1910. There is the standing problem which occurs to every student of Ball, 'Why did the original explorers trouble to cross the same ridge twice?' *Solvitur ambulando*. There is no means of reconciling the map, the books, and the facts by the use of the brain alone. I state the facts simply, leaving the map-makers and book-makers to make the best of them. We descended a little on the west face over snow (where I had expected, from some jumbled process of reasoning, to find rubble) so as to arrive below the steeper part of the Upper Roches Glacier. Then we traversed, still on snow, in a north-westerly direction, and nearly on a level, with only a few feet of ascent over rock, so as to reach a very obvious snowy col (a nick in a ridge running north-easterly and south-westerly). This appears to be the Col des Roches of M. Paillon's map, and is almost certainly the second col crossed by the Mathews-Bonney party on their ascent. Arrived upon it, however, we were as if we had crossed M. Paillon's Col de Thuria, for we saw the slope of ground and water descending right-handed towards the Upper Isère. On the left

was another obvious col, a broad snowy depression in a north-westerly-south-easterly ridge and at a considerably lower level. This was obviously the Grand Col, the Col du Pourri. We descended to this col, circling with a mountain wall on our left hand, unroped, and, by a series of long *glissades* over winter and avalanche snow, reached the ruined Pourri hut at the head of the Pissevieille glen. There was still much snow in the glen below the hut, and the little Lac de Merlons was like the Märjelen See at its best with half-frozen surface and icebergs. The way is unmistakable as far as the Chalet de l'Arc. Thence you keep the right bank of the Pissevieille torrent as long as you can until you reach the edge of the descent to the Isère. Then cross the stream, and leaving the pleasant track downwards to your right by the Chalets of Les Savonnes, turn left-handed and begin to ascend into the forest which clothes the extreme northern spurs of the mountain.

By now it was very hot, and the thought of an ascent was distasteful to us. Joseph, for once at fault, sat down and, waving the map aside (as he well might do even if he could have read it), refused to go up another mountain. Casimir fled into the forest to prove the way. We followed and Joseph came after, using language that I fear to reproduce. The path was lovely but discouraging, for it certainly went uphill. Uphill we followed it and down-

hill and uphill again and round the corner. This is none of your grim forests of the central Alps. Its very name—Bois de Malgovert—comes, or ought to come, out of a fairy story. ‘This poor forest has suffered much misfortune,’ said Joseph, looking at the huge trunks which, fully clothed in leaves and boughs, stricken by no mortal hand, lie all about and across the path. But he erred. These are the trees which were felled to protect the bower of the Sleeping Beauty, and you are in her wood. Sometimes you come on a little green clearing and a chalet and drink milk, and sometimes a fresh stream descends to you and you drink water, and all the time you wonder, even in your enchantment, when the fairies will have done with you and let you go down to the valley. At last you leave the trees and see suddenly spread before you the middle valley of the Isère, green and peaceful and well ordered, with the great reaches of the river and the tall poplars, and Bourg St. Maurice below you like a toy-town out of a German box. You plunge down thousands of feet of *pavé*, the pleasant countrywomen in their golden coifs wondering at you, the bugles from below blowing welcome; you pound across the valley, and all that is left of you after 9,600 feet of descent staggers to your inn through rows of officers and townsfolk in their Sunday best celebrating the Feast of the Assumption by ‘drinking watered



orange pulp', or whatever is the proper Savoyard tippie.

The joys of the day were not yet over, nor its anxieties. For hours we sat outside the hotel waiting for our luggage. At last the mediaeval wagon which does the business of Upper Val d'Isère swung perilously down the street, and we could shave and wash and creep humbly in to dinner. One battalion of a line regiment had come to relieve the other of garrison duty at Bourg St. Maurice, and the officers of both were dining together. The waiter, like an illustration by a French Caldecott, filled each of the forty glasses with sweet champagne. The colonel of the relieving battalion rose, careless of strangers, and gave the toast 'The honour of the regiment'. He spoke words that must often have been spoken before, but with an infinite grace and charm, in a low voice, without gesture. 'Vous allez peut-être en danger,' &c. The psychology of crowds is curious. We were tired and at the stretch of emotion, and full of regret to be about to leave that lovely land. The sentiment captured us. The tramp of armed men, the clatter of the battery mules which fills each of these glens summer after summer, the merry, hardy little soldiers making their picnic in every alpine village, all these things took a new meaning. This was France, not glittering as in Paris, no longer vainglorious, nor set on conquest, but patient, whole-

hearted, waiting behind her ancient barriers the instant peril of war.

War, with all its pomp and circumstance, eight bugles and eight drummers beating and blowing lustily just under our windows in the narrow street, beat us from our beds next morning, and as the dawn was dying we sat huddled in the diligence, surmounting in glorious laziness the slow zigzags of the Little St. Bernard.

### III

#### ‘THE CHIEF THINGS’

‘WE are taking a guide this time,’ said the Italian young gentleman, ‘because we find the gum exceptionally difficult this year. Ah! you are puzzled. Well, on the Italian side we call the Aiguille du Géant the “Dente”, and naturally, therefore; we call the rocks and snow from which the actual tooth springs “the gum”.’ The unhappy mountain causes other bad habits in its frequenters besides that of unpleasant metaphor. Because the rocks are exposed and cold it has become the fashion to start very late. But, however late you start, you will find the Courmayeur guides, if there be any on the mountain, anxious to waste time at the spot where the real climb begins. This is not from laziness or cowardice, but simply because the Géant has become the occasion of a day out; and no harm results, except the supremest harm of all, that you get back very late for dinner and don’t feel inclined for an early start next morning.

All these things cause the experienced mountaineer to laugh at the expedition and to wait years for the wrong side to get into condition. The experienced

mountaineer, like other superior persons, loses a good deal by his superiority, for no ropes and no familiarity can deprive the ordinary route of its amazing thrill. The Grépon and the little Dru demand far better physical condition for perfect enjoyment, and a leader of exceptional qualities for success and safety. The Meije is a mountain and the Aiguille du Géant a mere pinnacle. The Matterhorn was vanquished in romance and mystery and sorrow; the Aiguille was the victim of the chisel and the piton. But where else in the Alps do you lean out from the mountain-side into so free a bath of air and light? Where else can you laugh so freely as your legs and arms work happily in all but unconfined space? Where else are the precipices so terrific, and where else does the kindly rope leave you less ashamed? In addition, this year the unusual conditions have thrown in a piece of scrambling which the ordinary climber never sees. To avoid the snow, which has been throughout in perilous instability, the guides have taken a short cut, avoided in recent years by a wide circuit to the south. A few minutes before the usual halting-place at the foot of the climb this route leads over a rock crack, set at a steep angle. Admirable holds and a firm jam for the right knee take you up almost to the top. Here you must desert your staircase and find a hand-hold high on the right, firm and large when you find it. If you



don't, two elderly fixed ropes tempt you on the left, but trust them not. I watched the leader, with his heavy sack, approach the top of the obstacle. He fumbled for the hold, 'Ah, ça souffle,' he cried. I laughed, and then I trembled, and then, when at last he found it, I laughed again. With a marvellous agility I hopped up to the difficult place. With easy grace I stretched out my hand for the hold and missed it, and next moment, crestfallen and not unlike in appearance to a foul-hooked fish, was landed by Casimir on the shelf above.

The slabs themselves are too well known to bear description. But it may be well to warn the aspirant that it is both unnecessary and dangerous to hang with both arms on the ropes. In most places there are excellent holds both for hands and feet ; and an undue reliance on the ropes is apt to pull out the pitons and to result in bruised knees, if not in broken necks.

A day's idleness in Courmayeur disposed us to walk slowly to the Quintino Sella hut. Our porter was also so disposed, for he had a heavy load and had spent the previous day in a mysterious ascent above the Miage glacier. But, even had we not been blessed with laziness, we could not have hurried up the Val Veni and the Miage. Surely the Cantine de la Visaille is the most friendly of Alpine inns ; surely the dingle by the Lac de Combal is the greenest and

most delicious of Alpine halting-places ; surely the great, cool stream of the Miage is the most secret and most sacred of all the treasure-houses of the frost. Then, after your midday halt, the walk changes its character with dramatic suddenness, you turn sharp to the right from the almost even surface of the main glacier to cut up the little Glacier du Mont Blanc. You watch anxiously for the stones which come straight at the leader, and when he twists from them twist and turn after him. Noiselessly they come, with a slide over the upper ice and then a little vicious jump. You wish he would cut a little quicker or stop cutting and run for it. Suddenly he does run, jumps down into the strewn ice-blocks by the stream which flows between the glacier and the rock on its right, scurries over like a rabbit, and is climbing the rock beyond. After due deliberation as to the respective advantages of having your head broken by a block of stone or a block of ice, you follow. ‘Séracs fall here,’ says the *Climber’s Guide* grimly. They do, and so do stones, but I doubt whether the danger is as real as it appears.

The view from the hut is none the less impressive for being framed by the Aiguilles Grises and the lower slopes of the Mont Brouillard. The Dôme hut, 800 feet below, on the other side of the Dôme glacier, shows as a toy. Opposite are the astounding slopes which descend from the Col ‘Called Uncross-

able'; and as we watched them, silent but deadly, the snow continuously trickled in avalanches, which the scale of our environment made tiny. To the east the steepness of the ascending snowfield melted into mystery. There lay our way for the morning. Only to the south could we look into space and colour—the delicate majesty of the Pourri illumined by the setting sun from crimson to amethyst. The guides had left us to reconnoitre and make the steps for next day. They looked very small as they moved slowly upward, beating down the snow like black clockwork figures against a background which faded to dead white. At last they passed out of sight. An infinite stillness possessed the place. We were admitted to the very heart of the mountain, guests but prisoners. The curious ecstasy of what was to come was over us; and each of us, I think, felt very much alone. There is a different charm in every night-lodging before a climb. To some the warm fellowship of the chalet fire; to some the bustle of the crowded hut; it is by the Quintino Sella hut, above all,

Where essential silence chills and blesses,  
And for ever in the hill recesses  
Her more lovely music  
Broods and dies.

The guides were returning. Casimir related with glee how a huge stone had descended between them,

and, under its weight, the snow had peeled off like a garment, and they were glad to be back at supper.

Mont Blanc by the rocks is a sufficiently infrequent expedition to deserve a word or two of preface. It is beyond comparison the finest of the ordinary ways up the mountain. The Brenva, the Fresnay-Brouillard, and the various Peuteret routes, magnificent as they must be, may be disregarded as beyond the compass of an ordinary party. Of the others, that from the Têtes Rousses is considerably, and that from the Dôme hut a little, shorter; that by the Mont Maudit and Mont Blanc de Tacul is much longer. The Chamonix route may be reserved for the descent, as it needs the bold heart and green unknowing youth of the novice to face so many hours of continuous and unvaried ascent, viewless, and face to snow. But none of these ways has the mystery and splendour of the Rocher, none is so full of surprise, none gives the continually recurrent change from rock to snow and snow to rock which refresh the legs and the heart. The rocks are steep, and in places we found them icy. They are also rotten enough to make the leaders on the rope uneasy for the fate of those below and to make climbing very slow for a rope of six heavily-laden men. The general angle of the slope is also very steep,  $36\frac{1}{2}$  deg. from the surface of the Miage to the summit, 7,744 feet, as against 23 deg. for the slope from the Grands Mulets,



or 15 deg. from the hut on the Aiguille du Goûter. But this very steepness has its charm. When you raise your face from the banausic exercise of inspecting your next hold and see that you have overtopped the Aiguille de Trêlatête, and again look down on the even gleam of the Dôme de Goûter, you feel an inexpressible satisfaction. At last the mountain—‘the child of so many hopes and fears’—is yours. You have longed for him across an argent wilderness of peaks, perhaps you have watered with your superfluous adipose deposit those slopes on either hand. He has never been to you like this, so fierce, so intimate. The clouds were rolling round the upmost Bosse before we had clearly overtopped it. The books warned us that the climb was full of disappointments, and always had still another 500 feet of crumbling rock to disclose when you made sure of attaining. But there was no mistake. Imperceptibly the ridge melted into a broader pathway. I wondered in the fog what new devil’s trick was here, and we ran into a party whose manner of going disclosed the ordinary Chamonix grind, and almost immediately I tripped over a balustrade. It was the rope fixed to help the porters going to the hut by the summit. I ceased to grumble at Joseph’s pace, and he, flushed by leading on an unknown route without a moment’s deviation from the shortest way, strode confidently upwards to the

new hut which has taken the place of the Observatory.

We had been very slow—seven hours thirty-five minutes going from the hut; but six on a rope cannot move fast and safely on steep rocks. And we should have been slower still but for the track made by Mr. Jones two days before as far as the first snowy hollow. But we were well pleased. The workmen at the hut were as hospitable as ever. The descent was as glorious. It was only as we entered the village of Chamonix that the storm left his mutterings and fell upon us in heavy thunder and tempestuous rain.

1911

I

THE WESTERN OBERLAND

THE night was muggy and cloudy, offering little promise for the morrow. The day had been one of intense damp heat. Here on the Tête aux Chamois there was not enough light to save our slippered toes from the loose stones, and we moved with curses by the sense of touch. Only far down in the vale twinkled the friendly lights of the Ormonts, and on the other hillside Sépey with its great hotels glittered like a constellation. Around the little summit sat nineteen young men and maidens, of every age, so far as one could judge, from twelve to twenty, of every nationality in Central Europe, all very well pleased with themselves, very anxious to sing 'God save the King', and waiting for the moment when they could light coloured fires and signal to their friends in the valley. Their nineteen cigarette-ends made little fireflies in the darkness. The trysted hour came. The outraged hills were illumined, the Glacier du Sex Rouge thundered its protest, and we stumbled back to the Diablerets hut. There sat the pastor or master of the nineteen youths

and maids, a sad-eyed man oppressed by his three hours' walk from the valley and by a responsibility which he made no effort to fulfil. There sat also gloomy individuals on whom lay heavily the horror of the night to come. Then followed a curious hour ; one swinging and smoking lamp made the darkness more visible. Through it looked the faces of certain angry climbers, and of Joseph and Casimir, who regarded the scene as probably a normal circumstance of the matter of the Oberland, while through the kitchen and round the hills rang out every imaginable half-remembered music-hall ditty and national anthem. Even youth tired at last. The nineteen, sorted into a kind of order by a member of the party who still retained some sense of reason, were packed into the dortoir with one of us and an assortment of other travellers. Two of us took forcible possession of the bed of the gardien—an old gentleman who had the trick of leading you into corners with the air of one about to impart a tremendous secret, and, having got you there, proceeded to sell you picture postcards—guides and those who had no other sleeping room flung themselves on the floor, and sleep and snores filled the stuffy air.

‘Autrefois on avait peur des montagnes ; aujourd’hui on joue avec elles.’ So used to run the warning of the Swiss Alpine Club. A long disregard of the counsel has, I think, caused its discontinuance. But it would have been impossible to lie quite easy,



even had not my companion's knees smitten me in the small of the back, as I thought of the great company and its probable fate. The walk up to the hut from the Col de Pillon is without difficulty, but it is steep, and in places, where little natural chimneys have been improved by man, a slip would mean a fall of many hundred feet. Up there the company had straggled in the afternoon, and we had seen enough to know that all were unpractised, many were incompetent, and some tired out. Their guides looked on with amiable fatalism. I do not think that any one fell, as such an occurrence would probably have been reported in the papers. But it was impossible to count them, and it did not seem as if one or two would have been missed. One thought painfully of the morrow and of many morrows and many nights to come in similar surroundings, and of the sequestered charm of many a southern bivouac where the mountain gloom has not yet passed away into boisterous triviality; and so thinking I fell asleep.

There was no need for apprehension for the next day. We were off late, but long before the great company had begun to stir. Up stones we went, and then glacier, on to a wide, snowy plain and into a fog. After a little we reached a hummock and called it an *arête*, and walked along it until we came to a big crevasse and put on the rope—then more *arête* and some argument as to the way, which was

solved by stepping out of the fog on to the top. Mont Blanc was clear and wonderful, the great Jorasses surprisingly black, Grand Combin surprisingly high. The rest was hidden. The proper starting-point for the Diablerets is Anzeindaz ; and if you come thence you climb up a very steep wall at one part of which you swing out from the cliff, it is said, like a candelabrum. We found several parties on the top who had come that way, but none of them looked as if they had adopted or could adopt the position of a candelabrum. So perhaps what is said is untrue. Having looked closely at them to make sure of this, we took off the rope and walked back again into the fog, walked round the great crevasse and quietly down the Zanfleuron Glacier to the gaunt inn below the Sanetsch Pass.

The Sanetsch is the one spot in the Western Oberland where we found comparative solitude. It is hard to say why, unless it be that the very spirit of the place suggests loneliness. Behind are the pastures which lie round the pass itself, full of desolation, on the left the steep slopes to the secluded wilderness of the infant Zanfleuron stream, on the right the still more desolate limestone plain below the Zanfleuron Glacier. Below the ground falls to an infinite depth, where faith places the heat of the Rhone Valley ; and beyond the gulf southwards, far as the eye can see on either side, stands the wall of the Pennines. We saw it that morning as a great

mysterious rampart. The Combin dominated. But the other peaks looked through the thunder clouds and hid again too rapidly for identification. Spurs and buttresses assumed the form and majesty of their greater neighbours and were deposed as the clouds shifted, until again the storm blotted out the vision.

Next morning was like that which was gone. A steep pasture, a stony wilderness, a little glacier, and then the rocky barrier which cuts the Glacier du Brozet in two brought us immediately below the summit of the Wildhorn. Here I wished to circle eastwards on to the Glacier des Audannes, but Joseph urged us to a direct ascent. We found the rocks very loose, and turned westwards and northwards, always making a little height and looking for the easiest way. Little couloirs of ice began to intersect the rocks, and the latter steepened and became more rotten. At last we roped and cut straight up the most unpleasant of the couloirs; two minutes' scramble and we were on the ridge; five minutes' walk and we were on the top. From a comparison of times I fancy that Joseph's variation cost us about an hour.

Our next point was the summit of the Wildstrubel, and the traveller so bound has a choice of routes. He can go by devious ways eastwards over snow and stones direct to his gîte for that mountain, or he can descend north-eastwards to the pleasant pastures of Iffigen. Had we known that hard by the Wild-

strubel hut there stands an excellent mountain inn, or *bewirthschaftet* hut—the Rohrbachhaus—with fresh meat and beds—our sense of shame would have impelled us thither. But, blessed in our ignorance, we turned for the inn and the valley. You don't look in the Oberland for charm or surprise so much as grandeur, and all the spell-bound green glen soothes you the more. The glacier stream leads you to a mysterious lake the exit of whose waters no man knoweth ; you turn sharply through a cleft in the limestone and enter the lower glen, then come more pastures and woods, and suddenly the little inn, a yellow box like a house in a German fairy-tale, full of hospitality and milk and Swiss *pensionnaires*, and, standing on the veranda, the maid of the inn, the heroine of the tale, young, audacious, gay, brown with the sun, conducting with Teutonic grace seventeen separate flirtations, but stony-hearted against five bearded and excessively dirty strangers, four of them middle-aged and very halting in the German tongue. For such there were no beds, nor hope of any. How we borrowed a room and made ourselves less repellent to the female eye, and how the female heart gradually softened, and how Joseph, with the old campaigner's divination, chose the mother and wheedled her in a tongue which she couldn't understand, and how we were given a bed in a passage where *Mädchen* came and went in great companies giggling pleasantly, and



how we sat all that lazy afternoon and saw streams of parties starting for the Wildstrubel hut, and were glad, whatever fate might bring, that we were not going too—all this were long to tell. Enough that the place threw its spell upon us, and we left next morning in a gentle melancholy.

Storm was again our companion at the Rohrbachhaus. But the morning made amends. The crisp snow of the Plaine Morte Glacier elated us. The pageantry of the morning urged us on. For once the Valais mountains stood clear and cold, every rib discovered by the moon, every slope bathed in colour by the advancing sun. We rioted in exercise, and seemed to ourselves to have the wings of the morning—an illusion which was dispelled when two other parties caught us on the top. Here also came a disappointment. One object of our high level route had been to accustom the guides to the sight of the Central Oberland peaks by gradual approach. This had been defeated on the first two mountains by fog; and the view eastwards from the Wildstrubel is so muddled and masked by the mountains of Kandersteg that the principal emotion now aroused in their breasts was a desire to go up the Altels. However, the ridge has other charms. It rises in so many nearly equal lumps all the way to the Grossstrubel that geographers can argue ceaselessly as to the authentic summit. All the way the southern view tempts you to take your eyes off your footsteps,

and in a little you begin to look down to green Adelboden to the north. Then from the last summit you swing round south-westwards below the ridge and, passing over stones into a great couloir, reach the Lämmern Glacier. Oddly enough, it was here on the open glacier that some one first mentioned the rope. He was indignantly thrust aside, and in a few moments we were spread out absurdly on glacier-worn rocks, ashamed to ask for its moral or physical assistance. But the moment's pause did not check our spirits. Singing in our hearts, we came to the bleakness of the Gemmi, and, singing still, to the woods which looked down into the Gasterental. I saw that sight last in drenching rain, but now the sun and heat were Italian. The vale thundered with many waters. The guides were enchanted. The screen of greenery veiling the distant snows recalled the Val Vénì to them. 'You must find us a mountain to climb from this valley,' they said. We laughed at them, and promised greater things to come; and thus, laughing and footsore with the dust of the Gemmi path, we came back to civilization, to Kandersteg, a new Italian town, and the unfinished works of the Lötschberg Railway; and, just as we had given up hope of reaching the end of the longest village street in the world, the accustomed thunderstorm rolled down from the hills.

## II

### JUNGFRAU AND SCHRECKHORN

‘*Vous montez en haut !*’ said Joseph, ‘*C’est une belle pensée.*’ The stolid gentleman to whom the observation was addressed looked puzzled—as well he might, for he was already halfway up the Bergli rocks and appeared unacquainted with the French tongue. But we were pleased, and bore the sentiment in our hearts ‘long after it was heard no more’. Some such motto seems a necessity at Grindelwald, where mounting on high is the last thought of the visitors. They arrive in crowds tightly packed in the Interlaken train, leave their seats, if at all, for a glass of beer at the Railway Hotel, and depart again on the first opportunity ; or, if they belong to a slightly different social class, they fill the streets and the hotels until there is no more space, fight for iced coffee at the tea shop, and make loud remarks, wounding to the modest mountaineer, on the shape of his ice-axe and the holes in his breeches.

We were glad, therefore, to be at the Roththal hut, though we might have been supposed to have but little cause for rejoicing. We were wet through. The clouds surged and boiled on the level floor of

the Roththal Glacier, and the slopes on the south and east sullenly announced the warmth of the evening. In any other year it would hardly have been worth while to argue about the best way to reach the buttress of the Jungfrau. But in August 1911 failure through bad weather was not to be feared. As we scanned the upward way there suddenly appeared on the sky-line three disconsolate figures. We watched them descend slowly until they arrived at the hut and could tell their tale of woe. They had reached the summit in good time in the morning from the Bergli, and left to descend at 8 a.m. Since then they had not halted to eat or drink, but had spent eleven hours of desperate peril—so the most talkative declared. ‘Do not attempt it,’ he said, ‘the rocks are perpendicular, the way is impossible to find. We were to have gone next to the Lauterbrunnen Breithorn, but I have learnt a lesson. Now I go back to the Tyrol, where there are no rocks, and you find a hut every three hours. But perhaps you like scrambling up rocks. In that case go on, but you will find misery.’ This young gentleman’s conversation is instructive. He was in fact a splendid specimen of the hut-haunter led astray for once by over-adventurous companions, but, unlike his kind, most amiable, well-mannered, and frank. One at least of his party looked and moved like a competent mountaineer. But the thought of



those eleven hours spent in descending 4,600 feet on a mountain which is perfectly well known, and not in itself difficult in fine weather, makes one tremble. One hour more and darkness would have surprised them, weary and out of temper with one another, on that exposed ridge. Is it any wonder that the industrious statisticians of the Swiss Alpine Club can pile up year by year so long a column of mishaps?

We supped our fill with horrors with our soup, and, I hope, looked grave enough. Next morning, *audaces omnia perpeti*, we affronted the perils. The mountain seemed to me to have grown steeper in the last eight years, but oddly enough also shorter, and this although, in traversing the Hochfirn, crevasses forced us to make a wide sweep northwards before we struck up to the summit-ridge. In other respects the great Virgin remains unchanged. For what can change that glorious sweep of vision when you reach the topmost rocks and turning round look far over the foothills and the green plain? Or what old age of the spirit would not respond at that moment of ecstasy when your head reaches the level of the arête, and all the glorious spires and domes, ramparts, and battlements leap into view at once? You gasp at them, partly from admiration and partly from lack of breath, and then let your eye look down to the mighty ice-basin below and the long-cool stream of the Aletsch, the treasure-house of the frost.

The descent to the Bergli was marked only by our encounters with the numerous parties who had ascended thence that morning. I was filled with admiration at their hardihood and the shape of their boots. We shift and bedeck and bedrape us with every kind of device likely to make our toil easier. One eminent firm makes our boots and another our knickerbockers. Our crampons come from Munich, and our ropes from Shaftesbury Avenue or the Commercial Road. These others, their feet fast bound in tight brown paper, pick up a guide at the corner by the Bear and manfully or womanfully face the horrors of the Bergli hut and the long slopes by the Mönchjoch. If the success of a holiday is to be measured by the number of violent sensations which can be compressed within it, theirs is the better part.

The day was to be completed by what is now the usual highway for the Bergli—the Jungfrau Railway. We felt some shame in choosing it, but the experience should not be missed. The ice-scenery between the foot of the Bergli rocks and the Eismeer station is more magnificent than that to be met with on any of the ordinary routes round Grindelwald; and the entrance into the internal regions of the Eiger, the galleries and restaurants scooped from the rock, are like nothing but a scene from Jules Verne. Add the courtesy of the railway officials, very noteworthy in

Central Switzerland, and the insatiable curiosity and wonderful ignorance of the tourists—one man took the trouble to correct us, as we discussed the route from the Little Scheidegg to the Eiger, to point out that the only way up ran inside the rock—and you have a very pleasant ending to a day in the mountains.

If the Jungfrau is virginal enough in appearance, she takes no pains to veil her charms. The Schreckhorn is a different business. His name may, in origin, have nothing to do with terror. If so, the chances of the German tongue have been singularly happy. The savagery of the appearance of the peak, the sheer blackness of the summit-ridge, the intimate recess from which the foundations spring, the great cleft of the Lower Glacier by which the climb is approached, and the glittering and riven firths of ice which seem to threaten you as you draw near, all these would give to the mountain a character of ferocity, strange and overpowering to the spirit, even if men's misadventures and apprehensions had not added some further dread. The gloom of a heavy morning delayed our start, and we were almost hopeless as we entered the great couloir. Somewhere a moon was trying to pierce the fog, but its existence served only to give an excuse for dispensing with the lantern. The snow was firm, our crampons bit upon it, and we made good progress. Dimly through the

## *Jungfrau and Schreckhorn* 131

darkness loomed the great walls of the couloir, magnified and steepened by the uncertain light. Something thundered far on our right, but it did not come near us nor our track. Our own path was noiseless, for speed and emotion kept us silent. At last Joseph crossed the avalanche furrow and turned to rest on the rocks on the true right. We lit our pipes and

Like sacrifices by their watchful fires  
Sit patiently and inly ruminate  
The morning's danger.

We had been warned that the top of the couloir is never quite free from the danger of falling stones, and in this heat and with impending storm it seemed hopeless to follow the couloir to the Kastenstein Firn and attempt the 'Anderson Grat'. So when we had resumed our way and recrossed the furrow it was to leave the couloir at the earliest moment and cross the Schreckfirn to the foot of the wall leading to the Sattel. The rest of the couloir was as menacing as below and as harmless. The passage of the Schreckfirn was as dreary as the passage of a glacier may be expected to be when it is accomplished in mist by five men who have already walked too fast for a couple of hours and see no hope before them. But when we had crossed the glacier, and were already, still doubting, on the slopes above it, our fortunes changed suddenly. The clouds were tossed



aside. A great wind from the north swirled along the ridge above us. The rocks gleamed at the touch of its fingers. The ridge from the Sattel to the Lauteraarhorn bristled with long spikes of hoarfrost. The wind ceased suddenly as it had sprung up, and we resumed our painful path, happy, for the day was ours. From the Schrecksattel to the top was a delight, mere physical pleasure in easy accomplishment in a bath of air, and before we could believe it we had won. Still at times the mists played about us, but we were at home. Old friends gave us greeting, the storm was gone, and we were with 'the creatures of the great calm'.

Our joy was subject to intermission, for the descent from the Sattel to the glacier was very evil. The slopes on the east of the summit-ridge had hissed horribly as we passed above them. Further down everything slipped as one moved. The rocks stayed in place only in defiance of gravity, and every one else's pace seemed alternately reckless and pottering. It is hard to understand why any one should ascend the great couloir. The Swiss Alpine Club has with a fatherly forethought for our brain-pans erected an excellent hut at the foot of the Strahlegg Pass, whence the Schreckfirn is accessible in absolute safety. Yet the Schwarzegg hut is overcrowded night by night, and the Strahlegg hut left to the hut-haunter. It is incredible that any one should descend the great

couloir, but on the evening before our climb we saw a party glissade down it at 7 o'clock in the evening. We were not made of sufficiently stern stuff for such adventures, and turned to the friendly slopes of 'Gagg', by which we reached the Schwarzegg in one hour and twenty-five minutes from the bergschrund below the Sattel, so that, even in time, there is not much to be said for the couloir on the descent.

It was outside the Schwarzegg that Joseph expounded to us his theory of the instability of mountains. 'When the good God,' he said, 'had finished his work upon the world, which he made flat and smooth like a dinner-plate, he washed his hands in the sea and shook them, to dry them, over the surface of the earth. The grains of sand and the remaining flakes of mud fell on Central Europe, and you see the result.'

### III

## BREITHORN AND BIETSCHHORN

THE feelings of the mountaineer in the Valley of Lauterbrunnen have been expressed for him long ago. Our eyes cannot see more truly nor our hearts beat with a more exquisite thrill than those of Leslie Stephen. Our only advantage is that we can at least read *The Playground* and find some magic added by him to 'the loveliest place in the world', and, as we look at the Jungfrau, to plagiarize his own most apt quotation, still for us

Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals  
From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure  
And bosom beating with a heart renewed.  
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine  
Ere yet they blind the stars.

Yet if I were free to choose the best place from which to view these glories, I would take, rather than his favourite Wengern Alp, the Upper Steinberg. Detailed comparison would force one to some show of depreciation of the former; and between those heavenly courts who shall dare to sustain a preference? Yet the woods of the end of the valley, designed to set off the gleaming shapes which rise

above them, the fall of waters, the pleasant turf, have a sweet soothing influence which is absent from the grandeur of the cliffs about the Guggi and the Eiger Glacier. I came again there in happiness, modified by Joseph's fondness for short cuts. I left in regret.

Very slowly we made our way up the Tschingel Glacier, rounded the familiar slopes to the Petersgrat, and came to rest below the Tschingelhorn. There foolishly but fortunately we left our sacks. Very slowly we toiled on to the Wetterlücke, for it was now full day and the going was heavy; and it was all but noon before we reached the summit of the Breithorn—to me joy inexpressible, for twice before had the storm driven me, drenched, once to Ried and once to Kandersteg. A little short of the summit we met a party from Ried descending, and when we were on the glacier again we sought for their tracks, without shame, but vainly. We made a detour to fetch our sacks, and then descended the right side of the Inner Fallerthal. Meanwhile the Ried party had tried to force their way down the left side of that glen, were cut off, forced to reascend, and were late at Ried—a fate from which nothing preserved us but our laziness in the morning. To come to Ried is to come home again. The waters of the Lonza fall to the Rhone to mingle there with those of the Vispbach and the streams from Arolla and Zinal. Man



has harnessed those waters to his pleasure and built great buildings beside them and set them round with tennis-courts and, for all I know, golf-courses. But he cannot take away the days that have been and yet shall be beside them, nor destroy the longing of the mountaineer for 'somewhere in the Valais'. And wherever the Lonza waters fall to, they are musical in themselves and flow through pleasant pastures, and the inn, which has a new story to it, smiles to see you, and dinner is as unpunctual as it used to be, and the place is full of the clatter of axes and the scraping of boots, and the inn album full of great names and dusty with contests of long ago. Above all here springs the great horn so long desired, imposing, taking its place, for all its less than 13,000 feet, among the few really great separate mountains of the Alps.

The sleeping arrangements of the Bietschhorn hut have been contrived with a horrid ingenuity which would do credit to a mediaeval torture-chamber. You lie three in a series, parallel to the hut's length. The advantage of this is that the inside man is suffocated, the outside man falls out of bed at intervals, and the middle man, with his knees in one man's back and his back in the other man's knees, is jostled at every gasp of the one or pant of the other. After a space of agony I gave it up, slept on the ground in the kitchen, and was still surly when we

issued into a perfect night. The moon was hidden by the slopes below the Bietschjoch and the lanterns of two parties, one above and one below, made spots rather of colour than light. As we rose, Saturn and Mars together near a dying moon made our poor fires pale, and on the glacier the light of a day still to be born put out our candles. The local party crossed to take the north arête. The third party (two German *Führerlöse*) followed us, though we knew it not, to the west. It was still too dark and cold to climb rocks, and after half an hour's going, we halted to eat, rope, and watch the procession of the sun. He came out of the uttermost parts of the earth, very slowly, lighting peak after peak in the long southward array, dwelling for a moment and passing on. Opposite and first to catch the glow were the great mountains of the Saasgrat and the Weisshorn. But more beautiful, like the loom of some white-sailed ship far out at sea, each unnamed and unnumbered peak of the east took and reflected the radiance of the morning. The light mists which came before the sun faded. But, to mark the gulf of air between us and the southern wall, a mighty column rose from behind Brig and hung in the heavens, expanding slowly east and west at the summit-level like the branches of a huge stone pine. It was the smoke of a forest fire, but, in the limpid atmosphere, it suggested no terror, only beauty of

colour and form as the sun touched it. The display had hardly melted into fact when we moved.

Perhaps in years of ordinary weather the west arête and the stretch from where the north and west arêtes meet may have some difficulties. We found all swept clean for us, and in those conditions there is nothing to fear from an ascent of the Bietschhorn from the west. On the top we met and exchanged experiences with the local party. They did not prepare us for what was to come. At last we moved off bound for the northern arête and followed by the guideless party. In ordinary years this ridge is crowned by snow or ice, and in the afternoon its steepness requires great care. We found it either bare of snow or carrying only a crest beside which it was possible to climb with one's feet on rock, or, where the rock was covered, firm and fair going. The conditions allowed frequent traverses on the southern side, and I hardly noticed that, on one of them, the obvious route was leading us so far from the crest that we were committing ourselves to the great couloir seaming the whole west face. The rocks, which hitherto had been loose enough to require care, worsened; I looked up on my right and saw the arête, riven and all but tottering. Even our present position seemed better, and we persevered. Everything came away at a touch. It became obvious that the stones sent down from

behind were due to something besides the movements of one's companions. I leant forward and looked down; below our slope the mountain was gathered into a funnel, the bottom of which was lined with ice and terminated in a narrow ice channel garnished with fallen stones. Amongst these were the big steps cut by previous parties. As I looked a great stone started from above and came rolling and then leaping downwards, and then executing evolutions of a complicated kind in the air which ended with a huge parabola and a plunge on to the glacier. We began to hurry. But in a few moments the mountain began to hurry too. Crash, bang came the stones; sometimes singly, sometimes in great battalions, singing and leaping and splintering, sending up little grey puffs of dust as they hit all round us. Some were the mountain's own revenge on intruders, but the noise and nervous strain were increased by others, probably harmless, sent down by our followers and by those which, crashing from the west ridge beneath the feet of the local party, all found the same destination at the mouth of the couloir, while those which we also discharged to clear our way added to the confusion. Finally, as we stood for a moment huddled against the cliff for protection, a huge flake of the mountain within touching distance slowly detached itself and with an awful lurch staggered forward, then dissolved into



its component parts, and with a roar went down. It was too much. 'Vite, vite, en avant,' cried those behind. With tangled rope we slid along the hill-side, adjurations urging us alike to speed and caution, we scrambled back on to the arête; a few feet of steep unstable rock and then of steeper firm and we were on the glacier. A few minutes later the German party came into view. Unconcerned they strode down full in the avalanche track, halted to look back just when a big stone passed between them, and swung off towards the Bietschjoch.

Our troubles were not yet over. Next came the peril of stones on the slopes below the Bietschjoch, not to be regarded lightly when there is more than one party on the mountain. Impatiently we took to the first long slope of snow and committed ourselves to a glissade. As I did so Joseph's warning voice forbade the operation. More impatiently at being checked I struck off wildly on that most exhilarating form of motion; in a few feet I struck on a hidden patch of ice, stumbled, almost regained my balance with a jerk, and was off again and over, whirling round and round on the flattest part of my person, mildly amused rather than frightened. The slope grew suddenly steeper and harder, the pace increased, and it was imperative to stop. I plunged the head of my axe in deeply and found it refused by the hard substratum, plunged it in

again, and held it down with all my weight and strength. The patch of stones at the bottom grew nearer and nearer, but at last the brake acted, the pace moderated, and I stepped off the snow almost as if I had done it on purpose, were it not that my torn and bleeding hands betrayed me. My companions were indulgent. Even Joseph sympathized more than he reproved, though whoever had a better excuse for saying 'I told you so'? We were saying farewell to our last and most desired mountain in a blaze of glory, and it was with gaiety and laughter that we came once more to Ried.

## THE MIDDLE AGE OF A MOUNTAINEER

MIDDLE age, or the middle age of which this paper treats, has but little to do with the passing of time as mere mortals reckon it. Rather is it an affair of the emotions, an affection of the spirit. Some men are born middle-aged, as I suppose that gentleman must have been whom I saw ascending the Breithorn. Clad in an ulster, firmly secured by a rope to a bearded peasant, clinging to two loops of the same rope depending from the shoulders of his protector, and placidly smiling, the patient slowly overcame the force of gravity. *Sic itur ad astra*. Others never know it. One, full always of zeal for the mountains and of encouragement for the backward youth of many generations of climbers, whom I mention here because but for his kindly counsel one particularly unpromising recruit would never have dared to aspire to this Club or to inflict this paper upon you—Horace Walker—in one of his last seasons in the Alps, came down from the Dent Blanche to Zermatt, accomplishing what had been an ambition formed almost in boyhood, a little stiff, forced to remember a little too much perhaps of the golden age, but as

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 143

fresh next morning, as ready for the open road and the bright eyes of danger, as if time were not and the springs of life were never rusted.

Many more, alas ! allow middle age to be thrust upon them, and abstain from the pursuit altogether. As they find year by year that the touch of rheumatism comes more acutely after the first climb, or the breath comes shorter and the waist-band enlarges itself, and the standard of speed is pushed ever higher, they conclude that, because the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc on one day is a feat beyond their powers, the sport is not for them. They fall to golf or motoring or other death-dealing pursuits. Their names are written for our learning in the pages of Conway and Coolidge ; but the Monte Rosa and Couttets know them no more, and year by year their memory fades from all the circle of the hills.

But some, showing a more excellent way, achieve middle age, reluctantly perhaps at first, and find, in abandoning what was rather a dream than an ambition, that they have discovered the true beauty and delight of the Alps.

I say 'reluctantly', for it is one thing not to be able to go to the Himalayas or the Caucasus and not to cross the Col du Lion, and quite another to admit to yourself that you can't, and, above all, that you don't want to ! The trivial round, the common task are all very well, but it is a terrible admission



that they furnish all you really want to ask, that you have become a saint through lack of capacity to sin ! The adjuration of the satirist to the Roman Alpine Club has no longer a meaning for you :

I, demens, curre per Alpes  
Ut pueris placeas et declamatio fias.

which may be translated with accuracy—

Run, Mr. Young, uphill, with all your might,  
That you may be the Montanvert's delight,  
And find yourself, your language and your speed  
Food for an evening's jest by Mr. Reade.

But it is a bitter reflection that you will never find it necessary to justify your own Alpine irregularities by writing homilies in the *Times*, because you are practising an enforced morality.

Great crises in a man's life pass sometimes unnoticed.

Not till the hours of light return  
All we have built do we discern.

But I was surprised, in a charming paper read to this Club by Mr. Clapham a year ago, to hear that he had forgotten the manner of his conversion. My own remains singularly vivid to me, and it was accomplished, curiously enough, by a book which should have been in the mind of any one whose imagination was caught, as Mr. Clapham's was, by the first sight of the peaks of Dauphiné, a book

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 145

familiar to every member of the Club, the most vivid and the most bracing of all books of travel—Mr. Whymper's *Scrambles*—which had strayed by some chance into the house library at school. And my feet, thus set upon the right way, were confirmed by another book, excelling rather in charm and allurements, and differing from the first, as the Italian valleys to which it entices you differ in their warmth and strangeness from the austere majesty of Mr. Whymper's subjects—Mr. Freshfield's *Italian Alps*. I can well remember how as a boy, going back year after year to the green meadows and the rounded hills of the Upper Engadine, I longed for the wildness of the Matterhorn, as yet seen only in the mind's eye and Mr. Whymper's illustrations, and for the clefts concealed beneath the precipices of the Cengalo and Badile, themselves clear to see in the evening sun, or for the dark recesses and silver lakes which you may look upon from Bernina or Palü.

My next spiritual crisis—the frank acceptance of middle age—was infinitely painful, and in no way softened by literature. I had just made the curious and unpleasant discovery, perhaps already noted by other travellers, but so far as I know unrecorded in writing—that the Valpelline slopes steadily uphill all the way from Prarayé to Aosta ; and the phenomenon, perhaps only apparent to the feet and other understandings of middle age, had suggested to me

that all was not as it had been, and that I was changed—

From what I was when first  
I came among these hills.

The walk had had the more objective result of taking all the skin off my toes. Conveyed to Cogne in a carriage, while Wollaston bounded by my side like a roebuck, I had sorrowfully trudged half-way up the Herbetet, and been chased back by snow, and was nursing my wounded feet and spirit in some discontent when there appeared to us—Mayor. A Cambridge education has, we are to understand from our late President, certain advantages, but; being received, as I am credibly informed, in a stagnant plain in which the only climbable altitude is the roof of Trinity College, it superinduces among the mountains a spirit of restlessness which is agitating to the more placid Oxonian feelings of Wollaston and myself. It must have been owing to this fact that, after a day of rain and an evening of downpour, we retired to bed doomed to rise next morning for the ascent of the Punta Nera, Punta Rossa, and Punta Bianca. These eminences are pleasantly described in guide-books as magnificent view-points, because, I suppose, no one would ever trouble to ascend any one of them if it were fine enough to hope for a view, or clear enough to see the unutterable drudgery before him. Wollaston

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 147

was free to slumber, as he had once before wandered round the Trajo glacier in a fog, and he sent us to bed with delusive promises of joining in the evening for an attack on the Grivola.

I explained to Mayor and to Gabriel Lochmatter the simple rules by which my life is guided in the mountains, that racing is an abomination unto me, and that my constitution requires to be fortified every three hours by an opportunity to admire the view and to receive nourishment, and, being satisfied on these points, we took the road. There are few more attractive paths than that to the Pousset when all your companions are heavily loaded and you can march free. But when the loads are equal and Gabriel sets the pace and Mayor takes it up, you have no time to gasp out a protest. I believe that we left our knapsacks somewhere behind a rock, because we found them there in the afternoon; and I know that we breakfasted on the so-called Col du Pousset, because Mayor says so. But my only recollections are of wandering like a lost soul in wind and fog along a sometimes snowy, sometimes stony ridge, and of conducting interminable and breathless arguments, every time we kicked an unusually large stone, as to whether we were on the top of anything. At last we all three found ourselves widely separated on a slope descending to a *Bergschrund* which looked like moraine and was ice, and the two amateurs of the



party wriggled and shivered until the professional and the friendly rope delivered us. By now we had had enough. We determined that the Punta Bianca was a cow-mountain—a peak beneath the notice of such distinguished persons, and we raced back for the wine bottle and the Pousset hut. I now found breath to accuse Mayor of his base treachery in the matter of the morning's speed, and could only get for excuse : ' Well, I always find it most convenient to walk the pace I'm set,' a truth which I had ample opportunity of testing before the end of the season.

At the hut we found no Wollaston, but Gerard, the local guide, laden with all the delicacies and delights which Wollaston always carries about in the mountains for other people to eat. They consoled us not at all for his absence—the only drawback to one of the great evenings of life.

The Pousset huts are sometimes ill spoken of, and, as there is only one sleeping place which holds two by a squeeze, as it is impossible to light a fire in the hut, as the interior has a very ancient and cheese-like smell, and the immediate surroundings of the exterior are—well, the immediate surroundings of a very large cow-chalet, those who visit it when the men and beasts are still there may find too many forms of animal life present to assist them to ' the sleep which is '—or should be—' among the lonely hills '. But for us all was well. Beasts and men had

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 149

sought the lower Alps. For a short half-hour the sun shone, and we bathed in a mountain basin where the local Pan disports himself on summer evenings in bright, clear water such as does not flow over any but Italian uplands. Then, amid the jeers of the guides, we raced over the grass, cropped close by multitudes of cows to make an ideal running ground for feet hot from London pavements, until we were dry and could dress. By now the sun had gone and; sometimes in wisps, sometimes in heavy masses, the clouds rolled round the cauldron in which the huts stand. Towards evening, with the gloomy slopes below Mount Emilius to look upon, the great wall of stones which shuts out the Trajo glacier, and only a hint below of the forests and glades to which the stream descends, there is no more fantastic place in the Alps—

The fair humanities of old religion,  
The power, the beauty and the majesty  
That had their haunts in dale or piny mountain  
Or forest or slow stream or pebbly spring  
Or chasms or watery depths—all these have  
vanished :

They live no longer in the faith of reason,  
But still the heart doth need a language, still  
Doth the old instinct bring back the old names.

It was impossible not to believe in and have fellowship with beings—I cannot say not of this world—but all merry and delightful, such as take

pleasure in the lives of the shepherds or the free life of the mountain-lover, in foul weather as in fair. And we were merry. The fire lit with difficulty because it rained so hard. And it was very cold, but it was difficult to warm oneself or to keep the soup from burning, because the wind, having inveigled you into a warm corner, suddenly swept round and caught your breeches in the flame. And we sang—a feat which I do not think that either of us is in the habit of performing at a less elevation. Whether it was the character of our melodies—as the guides asserted—that attracted the *Geister*, I cannot say, but, as the darkness grew thicker, so did the storm, until at last, tired out with laughter, we sought our couch and slept soundly until the rain began to come in in the morning—at least Mayor did. I was awakened in a quarter of an hour by a large rat which leapt from somewhere in the rafters in the direction of our breakfast, made a bad shot, and landed in my face.

This apparent digression, drawn out by the intense delight in recollection which it but faintly portrays, has a moral which I mournfully pondered next morning as, still in rain, we ran down to the valley. No true mountaineer, panting for his qualification to be inscribed in the great book which lies in the neighbouring room, could have felt anything but gloom at a wasted day. Any well-conducted

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 151

person fresh with the fire of youth would have lain sulkily, after the rat had roused him, at the thought of the loss of the Grivola, and returned indignant. I regret to state that all my feelings of indignation were swallowed up in the thought of the hot bath and the *vermouth e selz*—only Italian vermouth at that—awaiting me in the valley ; and all the afternoon, sitting in the sun—now again triumphant—watching the game of bowls which proceeds for ever in the street of Cogne to what would be the great danger of the limbs of the passers-by if there were any passers-by, soothing the youthful impatience of Wollaston and Mayor, I abandoned myself to the sensuous delights of middle age, and realized how much I had gained by the acceptance of the situation.

What, then, does the middle-aged mountaineer gain?—for everyone present can at once supply innumerable answers to the question ‘ What does he lose ? ’

First, he gains the joy of carelessness. No longer does he find it shameful to spend half a day in halts. His interest in records is gone. If his digestion will allow him, he can have four breakfasts in the morning on the ascent, and lie half an afternoon, if the little stones do not stick too uncomfortably into his back, watching the peak he has descended or looking down into the shimmering heat of the valley. He cares no more painfully to collate the annals of mountaineering until he has discovered a new route, and, having



accomplished it, to argue with acrimony all the winter for its authentic novelty. If he were ever so foolish as to make a new route, he wouldn't record it, and so it wouldn't count.

Then he has learnt all sorts of tips and fads and rejected all sorts of others. He has an epicure's delight in the choice of victuals and a dandy's in the choice of dress. He likes to carry his own sack. He knows, in the words of the poet, that

Clean shirts are more than cooking stoves,  
And sour wine than sweetened tea.

Above all he has gained the joy of reminiscence. Every mountaineer, and especially every mountaineer who has to read a paper to this Club, must feel a sense of rage against the pioneers. Their ruthless waste of new ascents, which, properly husbanded, might have provided material for the energy of generations; their reckless exploitation of all the jokes which, properly preserved, might have kept this Club warm far off in winters which we shall not see, remind me of the desolating track of an invading army. I should not have asked them to leave us the Matterhorn still untrampled, or the flea unridden, but they might have kept their feet from, say, the Mettelhorn, or have spared the porter from their mirth.

Still, there are compensations. No one who has

passed twenty or more seasons in the Alps, even if he be not one of the guilty band himself, can be without the vivid memory of some great presence to inspire his mountaineering career. I can never again cross the Col du Géant without seeing Melchior Anderegg and C. E. Matthews marching over for the last time on one rope, or sit in front of the Monte Rosa without a vision of the heroic form of Mummery. And the mountains themselves, for the middle-aged man at least, have gained something from their own defeat. 'What song the syrens sang or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture.' But who will ever solve the riddle of where Meyer rested on his ascent of the Finsteraarhorn, or what is the precise position of the old Weissthor? And if we have these controversies to inflame us, still more can we see the hills whose history we know with certainty through the glamour of all that our friends have given to them and they give back to us.

As I toiled once up the tedious slopes which lead on the east to the Passo di Bondo, there appeared over the top of the pass first one and then another snow peak, infinitely distant, faintly flushed, and swimming in the vapour of the Lombard plain between. 'There is the Saas-grat,' I said to my companion, but he—only half consoled for a tour in what he called 'this pig-dog land of Italy' by the

thought that he was to step over the frontier in five minutes—roughly denied it. Then, as we advanced and the well-remembered majesty of the peaks disclosed itself, his emotion overcame his obstinacy and he delivered his soul of this pregnant sentence in the German tongue : ‘ Ach ! to look upon one’s home mountains—that gives one something in the stomach ! ’ Some such feeling comes over every one of us as the summer approaches, keeps us restless in the train, makes us unduly talkative or morosely silent as we puff up the Rhone valley, and bursts in a paean—if a silent one—when we are at last among the hills once more.

## II.

I do not deny that, so far as this pleasure of the association of memory is concerned with the coming and going of the feet of others, the middle-aged man has seen changes that are displeasing to him. There are undoubtedly a great many more people in the world than there used to be, and a very large proportion of them, more or less unsuitably attired, place themselves, for reasons difficult to understand, within the confines of the Alps during the late summer and autumn. It is, however, probable that, if we find their presence irksome and their general appearance unattractive, they cordially reciprocate the sentiment. One may desire to possess in loneli-

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 155

ness the joy of all the earth, and yet hesitate as to whether the making of new roads and railways and the building of new and great hotels have not been an advantage to the lover of solitude. It certainly drives the folk together and keeps them together. You walk up the Riffelalp path now with much greater amenity than when I first made the adventure. You can get to the country more quickly; you can get away from your fellow-men more quickly; and yet I have never experienced any difficulty in finding quite uncomfortable places to sleep in and quite nasty things to eat, and, in the last few years, when circumstances have driven me to September climbing, in finding the mountains almost reserved for my own party.

What does seem, speaking quite seriously, a very grave evil is the condition of some rock mountains and of the surroundings of the more frequented huts. Descending the Swiss side of the Matterhorn in 1906, I found the resting place by the old upper hut in a condition of unutterable foulness. Three days later a furious wind caused us to shelter for a few minutes in the Vallot hut. In addition to the ordinary litter which makes huts on the line of popular ascents distasteful, the inner room was cumbered up with opened tins of preserved meat and the like which gave every evidence of long exposure to the air. The whole place was like a very insani-



tary dustbin. It was not my first visit to either spot, but the degradation of a few years was remarkable. There can be little doubt, I fear, that some classes of modern mountaineers do not themselves obey the rigorous etiquette which was more common some years ago, either in their own conduct on the mountain or in huts, or in the condition in which they leave huts, and do not, when they climb with guides, exact the same standard from the latter as of old.

But the reminiscences of the middle-aged are of a special and, as a rule, of a more engaging type. Years ago, when all the great peaks had been ascended by all possible routes, and it had not yet occurred to any one that an Alpine literature might be constructed out of the process of letting one's self down them by ropes, when delicacy forbade as yet the discussion in this room of guideless climbing, an ingenious Secretary induced an ingenuous member of the Club to write a paper on the subject of centrism and excentrism in climbing. At once a discussion raged comparable only to that burst of earnestness which fills the daily press every autumn on the subject of 'The will to believe' or 'Should women propose?' The excentrics pointed out with much invective the immorality of table d'hôte dinner and the discomfort of hot baths as compared with the chaste simplicity of Binn, Bignasco, and the Tosa Falls. The centrists did not indulge in so much

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 157

argument, but continued with unabated zeal their ascent of the smoking room window at Montanvert. Time has somewhat dimmed the interest of the controversy. Every rood of earth maintains its Grand Hotel, and I hear that sacrilegious hands have destroyed the smoking room window. But there remains, concealed perhaps, an antagonism between the two groups corresponding to a real spiritual distinction. Deeply seated in every human heart is one of three yearnings—the desire to get to the top, the desire to look round the corner, the desire to get home to dinner. It is the characteristic of the truly middle-aged mountaineer that, while he pays due attention to the last of these three cravings of his inner nature, his mind is set tensely on the second.

For my own part, from childhood I have felt this passion strong upon me, and, when you think of it, it is a child's passion, and therefore suitable to middle age. Many are the fairy tales which have their motive in the glimpse at another world where King Laurin and the elves dwell in the clefts of the hills, or the enchanted princess sleeps beyond her rocky barrier, or some sundering flood or some frozen haunt of the evil one shuts you off from the land of ampler spaces or more mysterious recesses than your own,

. . . and there

The sunshine in the happy glens is fair.

And by the sea and in the brakes

158 *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer*

The grass is cool, the seaside air  
Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers  
More virginal and sweet than ours.

It is the essential spirit of travel, the gadfly that drove the Icelanders to Vine-land, and the Goths to Rome, and Bonnie Kilmeny up the glen. That desire and no hard economic pressure, as the professors do vainly talk, has ever set men moving from the time when first, long ago, the fair-haired Northerner streamed down towards the shores of the midland sea, until the sailing of the last boat which took Mr. and Mrs. Bullock-Workman to the Himalaya.

And it is especially potent to the Northerner when the expected land is Italy, just as I suppose to those south-country folk, who first looked over into the Zermatt Valley, the longing to lie down by the green pastures of Winkelmatten must have been all but overpowering.

Thus my prototype will think most lovingly of passes rather than of peaks, and having learned that there are 'better prizes than attaining', and experienced his most poignant emotions in times of stress and in the tumult of the winds, will turn with affection to his failures rather than his, or his guide's, successes. I remember one such adventure which I must apologize for describing, since it has already received as much attention as it deserves from the far

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 159

abler pen of Mr. Mumm in a paper read before the Alpine Club in March, 1907, and published in the May number of that year's *Alpine Journal*. But I tell it partly because I disliked it so much at the time and partly because my own feelings differed from Mr. Mumm's as described in the *Journal* so typically that they aptly illustrate my text.

If you look east from any suitable halting-place on or above the Clariden-firn, your eye, travelling across the deep gap whose floor is made by the Biferten glacier and the wide pastures of the Sand Alp, will rest upon a wall of rock which, turning first a little east of north from the Bifertenstock itself, runs northward until it breaks away in the terrific precipices of the Vorder Selbsanft. This rock is the western containing-wall of the basin in which the Gries and Limmern glaciers have their common origin, and in places, notably just south of the Hinter Selbsanft, the Gries glacier and the top of the wall are all but on a level, so that, the coping-stone once reached, you have but to step gently down on to the glacier. The wall may, for all I know, be vulnerable in more places than one, but one deep and obvious furrow catches your eye at once as the true pass, and this, the Scheibenrunselücke, the Tentiwang pass of Mr. Coolidge's guide-book, happens to be just the spot where the wall sinks down nearest to the level of the glacier. The mere attainment in itself, how-



ever, of the Gries glacier or the Limmern glacier is only half the day's work. If you could see over the wall from your imaginary view-point, your eye would follow the Gries glacier on its northward course until it ends in nothing in particular, its torrent discharging over great glacier-worn rocks into a tiny lateral glen of the Limmern töbel. Returning to the head of the Gries glacier you would then look down the Limmern glacier, which, indistinguishable at first from its twin, soon takes an independent existence, strikes off eastward along the base of another great spur of the Bifertenstock, its southern containing-wall, as the Selbsanft ridge is the western wall of the Gries, until that wall also turns northwards, and the Limmern glacier, giving up its vain attempts to reach the Rhine, makes the best of a bad business and empties its waters also into the Töbel, to which it gives or from which it receives its name. Now whether it be possible to follow the Limmern glacier to its snout, neither Mumm nor I know. Had we done so, however, we should have been in the Limmern töbel, and we believed at the time that the only exit therefrom was by the gorge leading from the Töbel to the Uelialp, a route only to be followed at the driest of times by wading down a swift stream, and, in the autumn of 1904, wholly impossible. We both now think that this opinion of ours was mistaken, and if the state of the Limmern-

bach allows you to reach the track marked on the Siegfried map on the right bank of the stream, probably there is no difficulty in following it up from the Boden to the Nüschenalp.

Hence our impression was that on crossing the pass we should find ourselves in an enclosure, exit from which was impossible on the north, where no wall was, and that our natural, and indeed our only, retreat was by climbing the spur of the Bifertenstock mentioned above as the southern and eastern containing-wall of the Limmern glacier. Up this, trusting to the *Glärner Führer* and to the assurances of our local guide, we hoped to climb by a kind of band, or sloping shelf, and we knew that, the wall once scaled, we could walk along its top northward to the Kisten pass path and then to the Müttsee hut, our evening's destination.

To avoid confusion I should say that the word 'left', where it occurs on page 457 of the *Alpine Journal* for May 1907, is an obvious misprint for 'right'. The way up by the Limmern band to the Kistenstöckli (if it exists) starts from the right or south-eastern bank of the Limmern glacier.

The walk up the Linth-thal from Stachelberg by the left bank of the Linth to Thierfehd, and thence by the gorge of the Pantenbrücke and the forest to the Hinter Sand huts, is one of the most charming in the Alps. It was a clear, fresh evening with every

promise that the weather, which had already played many tricks upon us, was at last about to relent; and when we reached the Alp hut, standing in a great stretch of pasture, a green island shut in by the Selbsanft ridge and the huge precipices which apparently bar the way to Ober Sand, I shared fully Mumm's enthusiasm for the strange quietude of his favourite mountains. The herdsmen had driven down their kine long before, but they had lent us the key, and we had what was that season the unwonted luxury of an empty hut, with a roomy loft and plenty of nice wet hay to roll in. It is true that the night was one continuous effort to find a place on to which some one of the numerous holes in the roof did not discharge rain so as to tickle my nose. But, damp and disagreeable as the morning was, we knew that a porter with a great store of dainties waited for us at the Müttsee, and we had no idea of the penance to be undergone before we could reach that hut, and so we started gaily enough. If bound for the Scheibenrunselücke, our goal, you follow the well-trodden path towards the Fridolins-hütte for three-quarters of an hour, if you walk our leisurely pace, and when you reach the first bridge over the Biferten torrent, turn round sharply to the left or east and toil up very steep and pathless grass slopes until you are high enough to have turned the Tentiwang precipice. Then incline south-east and

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 163

proceed still up grass until you are nearly at the foot of the gully leading to the pass. Here one of those convenient shelves, which these accommodating mountains provide in the most unexpected places, leads you into the gully itself. We found ourselves at the foot of a slope, arranged at a very steep angle and always steepening to the pass. Direct progress seemed difficult if not impossible, and we traversed leftwards and northwards until in this direction also the rocks became sheer and destitute of holds. Then, turning right, we traversed back into the gully itself. All the way since we struck the shelf the scenery had been of the wildest character. We seemed to be climbing up the edge of the world. Indeed, except among the wildernesses to which the Zmutt arête gives access, I do not remember any spot in which you are so deeply committed to the mercy of the mountain, so savagely withdrawn from humanity. And on the Matterhorn your very height gives you glimpses of a kinder and more coloured world which are denied to you in the Scheibenrunse. It is only now, however, that the climb becomes interesting to those who value difficulty. Imagine yourself at the foot of a wall, not very high but practically vertical, the masonry of which has split from top to bottom. Imagine, then, that the defect has been repaired by the insertion of another block of masonry which in its turn has been



split by age and weather both from its original material and in itself. Up this intrusive mass lies the way, not a difficult way in any circumstances, since the rifts give large holds both for feet and hands. When, however, as sometimes must happen, the staircase is a plaster of ice or snow, or when, as we found it, the place is saturated with water so that every stone has been ungummed from its neighbour, it is trying to weak nerves. Inderbinnen, who was leading, is far too careful a climber to proclaim a security which he does not feel, and he soon began to express his opinion in indistinct mutterings. We huddled together to avoid the stones which he seemed certain to dislodge. Our local friend, who had already caused me some uneasiness, seized the opportunity to lose his head altogether. I directed, commanded, implored him to attend to the rope between Mumm and himself and between himself and me, and to belay the latter round the firmer parts of the mountain, if any such there were. But his usual sprightliness of demeanour now vanished into a gush of patois. He wouldn't attend to the rope; he wouldn't answer; he wouldn't move up; he wouldn't move down. At last, Inderbinnen groped his way over stones which were apparently secured to nothing, Mumm followed, and our friend had to move or be cut in two. He didn't climb badly. But the consequences of climbing up rotten

rock with a rope gracefully festooned round the neighbourhood are apt to be painful to those below, and before I, in turn, somewhat constricted about the waist, arrived on the pass, several stones had asserted their obedience to the laws of Nature, and one had got me on the head, fortunately at very short range.

As we reached the top, we had full warning of the kind of afternoon we were likely to spend. The clouds were just rolling upwards and downwards over our future path. If we had been quite reasonable beings, we should have started off immediately, compass in hand. But both Mumm and I were hungry, and we have been too many seasons in the Alps to allow reason to direct our goings. For forty minutes we feasted and listened to the thunder of the rocks bounding and rebounding in the gully which we had just ascended, and effectually cutting off our retreat. Then, after the strictest cross-examination of our local guide and the most confident assurances that he could find the Limmern band (the shelf which, as we then thought, was the only egress from the glacier) in any weather, we set out. Our way ought to have lain almost on the level, a little south of east, so as to clear the stones which the Siegfried map marks as running up like a cape into the ice-streams of Gries and Limmern, and then slightly downwards and nearly due east to

the band. When therefore our leader started off uphill and southwards or south-westwards, I thought my sense of direction must be confused in the fog or else that some local condition of the ice at the division of the glaciers must make the *détour* necessary ; and, as no one else objected (the usual excuse of the blunderer), I followed obediently. After an hour's steady ascent, however, my legs made the protest which my mind refused, and simultaneously for one blessed instant the wind disclosed a secondary summit of the Bifertenstock straight in front of us. Mumm may be trusted to be kind to any companion, even the most dour. I have never known him choose any but the worst bed, the leg of the chicken, and the most uncomfortable position on the rope. But this evidence that we were walking steadily away from home was too much even for him. And in a few moments we swung right about face and were descending the Limmern glacier. The horror of the succeeding hours haunts me still. Sometimes for a moment or two the clouds melted to a veil through which the Kistenstöckli ridge showed dimly. More often they dissolved in little drizzles of clinging rain. Our man was still quite confident of finding the Limmern band. 'Where was it, then?' 'Down there where the end of the stone shoot could be seen against the cliff.' 'Why, then, was he trying to lead us to the left bank of the glacier?' 'Because that

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 167

was the only way of getting off.' 'But wouldn't that lead to the Limmern töbel, and was it possible to get out, once there?' 'No, there is no path out of the Limmern töbel!' 'Then why go there?' Patois and pantomime. Further interrogated there-  
anent. If we would trust to him, he knew the way well to the Limmern band. Advance. Wanderings again to the left bank. More patois : more pantomime. Then the statement that there was a thick fog and no one could be expected to find the way in a fog, coupled with the remarkable suggestion that we should sit down on a stone and wait for morning ! One of the greatest aids to success in life is, I understand from those who have succeeded, the faculty of losing your temper at the right moment. Mumm's natural fairmindedness prompted him, I think, to give this last suggestion his impartial consideration. But it was too much for the united party. The unhappy young man was deposed from his pride of place, and, still pouring forth a flow of unintelligible and plaintive patois, was tied up firmly in the middle where he could do no harm. By dint of what another would have called, and I still believe to be, the inherited guide's instinct of Inderbinnen, leading down a glacier which he had never seen before, in rain and fog and discouragement, we then groped our way down and to the right until we struck the bottom of the wall which we were seeking.



Even now we could not find the bottom of the Limmern band. We unroped to look for it, and while Mumm, Inderbinnen and I searched, our local friend bringing up the rear still poured out his assurances, firstly that we were not on the right way, and secondly that, if only trusted, he could show us where that way lay. Still, when interrogated, he took refuge in patois and suggested recourse, so far as we could understand him, to the Limmern töbel. At last, as our search brought us higher and higher on the cliffs, we decided that, if there was any Limmern band in existence, it certainly was not there, and that the only course remaining was to force a way straight forward. We tied ourselves up again as well as we could with a rope which was now, with wet and ice, of a consistency of wire, and plunged on, all fearing, though none daring to express the fear, that at any moment the cliffs might steepen and we might find ourselves cut off from the top of the wall. Progress was most painful. The whole slope ran with water. The rope kinked and caught. The local gentleman stopped continually to tell his tale of woe, and, every time he did so, jerked me off my legs. At last the cliffs did steepen. We did not seem anywhere near the top, but Inderbinnen pressed forward in desperation. For a moment he disappeared from sight. Then from the jerkings of the rope it was clear that he was going more quickly.

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 169

We crowded after him and found ourselves on the road where we would be. The rest of our adventures are of no interest. A wonderful race to reach the Muttsee hut before the snow actually began, and a weird riot in the hut dressed in a pair of gloves and a blanket (which were the only dry coverings available) concluded the evening. But, long before tobacco had made the inside of our resting-place as foggy as the night without, our local man had recovered his confidence, and was relating to the hut attendant with what unerring skill and with what cool courage he had delivered the three mad adventurers from the penalties which their incompetent rashness would otherwise surely have brought upon them. We felt too well pleased with ourselves to protest.

Next morning the unfortunate goats which glean a precarious living in the neighbourhood of the Mutton-See butted at the door of the hut for a refuge from the cold and storm, and on opening the door we found a foot of snow on the ground and a tornado raging. I even found it in my heart to forgive myself the somewhat unceremonious manner in which I had rejected the proposal to camp on the glacier !

## III.

One more typical reminiscence of middle age. If there be any district in the Alps where you need the thought of a round-the-corner country to make its civilization tolerable, it is the Upper Engadine. And, for all its well-ranged peaks, there is no other district which has so many corners round which you may go, nor any other civilized land with such delightful savagery within the reach of a day's walk. He who will leave dress clothes and little dances and a nine-course dinner should do so by the Forno Glacier, the best worth visiting and the most secluded of all the ice streams accessible from the Engadine plateau. There is something almost vulgarly ostentatious in the way in which the Morteratsch and Roseg glaciers flaunt their rather undistinguished summits to the passer-by. They take great care to be known of men and to have their beauties ticked off by the occupants of the six-horse carriages which sweep in triumph up and down the Bernina road. But all the societies of all the capitals in Europe may travel up and down between Italy and Maloja without suspecting that an easy three and a half hours from the carriage road through forest and up steep glacier will lead you to a spot whence as much fine confused climbing can be got as from any minor hut in the Alps. Indeed, even with the aid of maps and

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 171

travellers' tales, you hardly credit it yourself until you have breasted the lower Forno slopes and the full glory of the peaks surrounding the head of the glacier bursts upon you. On your left is the snow and ice wall which separates the glacier from the immemorial track to Italy of the Muretto pass. At the turning-point is Sissone: in front, the four needles of the three Torroni and the Punta Rassica leading to where, at the Cima di Castello, the ridge turns again to form the left-hand wall of the glacier. Over or between any of the Torroni peaks, passes of various degrees of difficulty lead to Val di Mello.

My first journey to Masino, however, was not over any mountain pass, but shamefully by the carriage road (so-called) which winds up interminably through chestnut trees from the Valtelline, and our first expedition there, naturally—as the first expedition of every traveller there must be—Badile and Cengalo. These accomplished, our thoughts turned to the real object of our journey—Disgrazia. And, with a little army collected at San Martino, we started for the Cecilia hut. There are two obvious ways of going from the Bagni to Cecilia. You can either go down the main Val Masino and then, turning to the left a little above Cattaeggio, go up the Vals Sasso Bisolo and Preda Rossa, at the head of which the hut is situated; or, without going into the Val Masino at all, you can go straight up Val di Mello as far as the



Piode Alp, and then, crossing the south-west spur of the Disgrazia by the Remoluzza pass, descend on the Cecilia hut. There is nothing to be said in favour of this latter route except the beauty of the walk up Val di Mello, and, as it furnishes far the best way down from Disgrazia, any one of common sense will choose the walk up Sasso Bisolo on the ascent. Needless to say, our local talent took us up Val di Mello, principally, I think, because the commander of the expedition had many friends in the farmsteads up the glen, and promised himself a pleasant walk, passing the time of day with them and exhibiting to their astonished eyes two strange adventurers. Val di Mello is certainly very beautiful, but it is also certainly very hot on a September morning. We had no temptation to hurry. The main valley stream makes music all the way, the great trees give you a pleasant shade and tempt you to idle where they offer it, and, when you are most repining at clothes made to resist the violence of an Alpine snowstorm, you drink from brooks which descend from Val Torrone and from Val Zocca and lift up your head. At last the valley comes to an end against the rocky theatre which is the last buttress of the ridge connecting the Disgrazia and Forno peaks. The grass grows more emerald green, the trees are more and more only the outliers of the forest, the undergrowth begins to disappear, and you begin to realize that

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 173

you will soon have to leave your pleasant path to wander up slopes of stone and dwarf rhododendron to the pass. Just at this crisis we reached a large Alp hut tenanted by a *bella donna* (of whom old Giulio had been muttering and chuckling all the way up the valley), together with an innumerable number of bright-eyed children and all those apparently superfluous young men with no particular occupation whom you may find leading a pleasant but a somewhat monotonous and meagre existence round all these Valtelline huts. By now the warmth and closeness were declaring themselves as only the precursors of a fresh break in the weather. A few large drops fell

And at length  
Thundered the heat among the hills.

If the advent of the rain had not so unfortunately coincided with our arrival at the Alp, I think we might have pressed on, as any ordinary party would have done in Switzerland, reached the hut in a few hours, and, having dried our clothes, been in a position for an attack on the morrow. But, as it was, what with the attractions of the *bella donna*, the curious cooking arrangements which appeared to be gone through as a ritual ceremony, and the interminable conversation carried on in patois with the hinds, nothing could drag Giulio from his shelter. What the conversation was all about I don't know.

Suppressed gigglings every now and then, which were all the more irritating as one could not share in the wit which produced them, suggested to my mind that some of the talk was carried on in the language of gallantry. For the most part however, the key to the riddle was probably to be found in an observation which Gentinetta made to me last year in Val Savaranche. A fiery gentleman with the air of a Socialist orator was addressing with extraordinary vehemence a little crowd of men in the High Street of Degioz. I asked our guides if they could discover from the porter what all the pother was about. And the answer came : ' What is he talking about ? In the mountains they talk of cows.' In any case, whether it rained or the sun shone, for two and a half unlucky hours we remained watching the polenta boiling. Then, as a much longer halt would make it impossible to reach Cecilia at all, I compelled a start. Anxious to show his zeal, Giulio deserted the path and led us straight up what appeared to be a watercourse. When our stockings and breeches were well soaked, the rain suddenly increased again and performed the same process to the upper parts of our persons, and without a word the guides and porters turned and ran furiously back to the Alp. Then another hour's wait, and more conversation. At last, a little after four, flesh and blood could stand it no longer, and we made a fresh start. It was supposed to be about

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 175

an hour and a half's walk to the pass, and say another hour to the hut. Of course therefore, all being heavily laden, we tried to walk much too fast; equally of course, the fog and rain descended again; and still more of course, when dealing with a San Martino peasant, the time was grossly undercalculated. An hour came and went. 'How far to the pass now?' 'About two hours.' I then suggested that the less heavily burdened members of the party should push on to wave a light from the hut door and make the soup ready for the remainder. But no, we must all keep together 'per far coraggio'. Accordingly we still ploughed on together. Another half-hour passed, and still no sign even of the approach to the pass, which by all accounts had now receded to a considerably greater distance than that which we had to accomplish when we left the hut. And still adjurations to keep together 'per far coraggio'. It appeared to me, however, that common sense rather than courage was the necessary ingredient to success. Basil Williams was quite willing to get wet in the good cause of restoring courage to Giulio, and I accordingly left him to do so; and, taking one porter with me, pressed on with all speed, hearing, as the distance between the two parties increased, the continuous pathetic bleat borne upward through the mirk, 'Tutti insieme, carissimo signore, tutti insieme per far coraggio.' The pass is reached, so far as it is



possible to tell in a thick grey fog, over gentle grass slopes ending in a steepish little scramble over stones. On the other side, further stones—horrible walking-ground in the wet dusk—led down very quickly to Cecilia. When we got there, of course I found that we could not wave a light to assist our companions, because we had left all the candles with them, and that my dry shirt was on the back of the other porter!

We were so wet and cross and tired with racing up the slopes to the Remoluzza that I doubt whether anything but the brightest morning would have nerved us to the Disgrazia, of whose difficulty I had at that time a very exaggerated idea. But in any case the following morning was as grey and discouraging as the night. We stopped at the hut long enough to have an excuse for saying that we had given the mountain every chance, then at last Apraktoi took the downward way by the Valley of the Red Meadow, turning away, in my case, defeated for the second time by the Mountain of Ill Omen. We were still quite cross when we paid off old Giulio at San Martino, though his childlike and bland manner and his apparent innocence of the reasons for our irritation sufficiently overcame our annoyance to make us abstain from chiding words. When we had paid him and written a eulogy of his masterly leading in his book, he begged us to wait a moment and disappeared into his dwelling, the only entrance

## *The Middle Age of a Mountaineer* 177

to which lies through his hen roost. A hideous cackling, as of Rachel robbed of her children, came out of the darkness, and a very large hen, which as it brushed my face seemed as big as a turkey cock and gay with all the colours of the rainbow, flew into the road. Then out came Giulio bearing in his hands the spoils as a peace offering—one white egg each. An egg is a difficult object to handle with grace. I think more than ordinary mirth must have provoked the company of the Milanese at the Bagni when Williams and I arrived half an hour later, soaked to the skin and bearing each in one hand an ice-axe and in the other the offering of the hen of San Martino.

I have dwelt lovingly on these failures, but there are two other even more precious possessions obtainable certainly by the middle-aged wanderer.

First come friendship and fellowship, and, if any one here has listened to this paper, he will realize by now that I must have considerable confidence in the infinite compassion of my friends.

So much for charity. Further, there is an amalgam of the other two great Christian virtues, faith and hope. Some years ago a very august member of this Club spent a summer in walking through a part of the Alps—as he described it, from end to end—and subsequently told the Club that the Alps were exhausted. The Alps can never be exhausted: not

by any individual member of this Club ; not by the united efforts of all the members in all the years which have led to this year of jubilee ; not by all the countless myriads who swell the ranks of this Club's god-children. It may be that men may more and more take that curious form of pleasure which consists in ascending the Jungfrau through a rabbit-hole, or the Wetterhorn by a rocket apparatus. Mr. Young may climb, if he has time, every perpendicular precipice in the Alps, and the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club descend into every pot-hole. We may find the old haunts desecrated, and we may have to abandon the Swiss side of the Matterhorn through the danger of falling sardine tins ; but for all this, shall love and fellowship be dead or the full moon paler over Monte Rosa ? Shut us off from the fashionable climbing centres, ticket every rib and every gully and catalogue every peak—the infinite vastness, the infinite variety of the Alps will remain unplumbed, unstaled, and for many years to come the middle-aged man and his children and his grand-children after him will seek among those heights, and will find, the peace, the freshness, and the purer air of another world. Whether in the translucent mystery of the morning or ' the incomparable pomp of eve ', they stand for ever for us unchanged, unchanging, only transmuted in the alchemy of the affections through what our hearts distil of recollection and of love.

## MOUNTAINEERING

I AM sure you all know him well. You may have seen him any fine day outside any of the hotels in the more mountainous parts of Switzerland or the Tyrol. But he is in his glory at Zermatt. There he sits where great American deck-chairs have supplanted the humble and somewhat uneven stones of the old wall to serve him in the office of a throne. His face is red and inflamed and sticky ; his hands are torn and dirty, as are his clothes, which tend to have a reddish tinge and to disclose patches of a cloth totally different in colour and material from the rest of his garments should he chance to rise and turn his back upon you. His shirt is flannel and dirty ; his hat is felt and dirty ; his boots are large and have often been clouted by the excellent cobbler down the village. But these are honourable scars. Portions of that reddish raiment are flapping in the wind on every rock peak from Monte Viso to the Terglou ; the dirt encrusted in his nails was garnered on the eastern face of the Dom ; the big scar at the back of his hand was caused by an over-impetuous friend, a jerk of the rope, and a big stone on the rotten arête of the Vêlan two summers ago, and his raw-beef face



is the result, not of a skin disease, but of a long day on the Grenz Glacier.

There he sits, the mules laden with heavy German gentlemen in ulsters, bound for the Schwarz See, going up the street, the sun blazing down upon the dust among the little cobbly stones, which are every now and then sprinkled by a small boy with a watering-pot, with Jost smiling benignly in the shadow of the hotel door, with a fountain, which never plays, behind him, the Matterhorn on his left, the murmurous complaint of the Visp torrent in his ears, and all around him a pervading sense of mule and heat and tourist—there he sits, as you have often seen him, talking, talking from breakfast until the Riffel Alp lights go out, with intervals for such refreshment as is provided by table d'hôte and the bier-halle at the Mont Cervin. If you like to lie late, as is my habit after a hard day, you may open your window and get back into bed again, and see the Matterhorn and the sun, and hear the earliest chirp of half-awakened guides discussing with him ; and as you shut the Venetian shutters at night, some stray revellers will still be at it. The talk flows always in one channel ; it is conducted in such broken German-Swiss as he can master, and such broken English as the guide has learnt at the winter night-school. In the morning, when it consists of descriptions of the doings of the previous day, the terrible state of the snow,

the absurdly rotten state of the mountain, and the misdeeds of other parties, the men talk confidently with loud voices and more than a touch of swagger, while all around the voices of the young lady admirers are hushed and the fierce light of achievement beats upon the heroes ; towards the late afternoon it becomes more subdued, it is carried on in whispers and surrounded with an air of mystery. Dirty fingers follow suggested routes on the pinkish maps spread on the iron tables, while the guides, who regard maps as English missionaries look on heathen-fetish ceremonies, punctuate the proceedings with much spitting and many cautious remarks (‘ One couldn’t can tell ’ is a favourite idiom) accompanied with an appearance of impossible wisdom.

All this must be infinitely wearisome to the un-offending tourist. But after all we (for I may as well frankly associate myself with the monster whom I have tried to describe) are scarcely worse as bores than golfers, or shooting or hunting men ; while our sport, if so I may dare to term it, implies no death to anything but ourselves, and gives breath to no such flow of eloquence as I have learnt to associate with the first-named amusement.

Still, I feel a shyness, alien perhaps to my subject, in inviting your sympathies. Long ago every mountain of respectable height in the whole range of the Alps has found its conqueror. The Grépon, only

a few years ago reputed to be the most difficult climb in the Alps, is an easy day for a lady. The Drus, which only yielded to a siege of many summers, are strewn from summit to base with sandwich papers and empty sardine tins, and on the top of the Matterhorn, it is rumoured, a large and familiar notice-board warns the hardy mountaineer that this hill is dangerous for cyclists. From the day when Mr. Wills, accompanied by old Christian Almer, Ulrich Lauener, Peter Bohren, two Chamonix guides, a large iron flagstaff, and a small fir tree, ascended the Wetterhorn, introduced the Chamonix men to the ice-axe, and incidentally introduced the sport to the public at large, the pioneers, chiefly Englishmen, set about their work of robbing us of the mystery of the mountains, and left but little work for the civil engineer to do in this direction. Christian Almer died in 1898, having celebrated his golden wedding by an ascent of the same mountain; and Mr. Justice Wills's pedestrian feats are the wonder of the High Sheriffs of the Eastern Counties. What a grudge the modern climber must ever bear to these, 'qui ante nos in mundo fuere!' They were bold in the fearless old fashion, and their limbs are as memories yet; and the regret to which they move us is as piquant as it is lithe. No new mountains remain to be ascended for the first time, and no new routes to be made which do not imply a risk

from falling stones or ice altogether disproportionate to the interest in the attempt. The pioneers endured real hardship ; there were scarcely any shelter-huts, and the absence of paths must have made the early hours of each expedition laborious to an extent hardly to be realized by any one who has not tried tracking over boulders and through forest by the light of a candle carried by a sleepy guide. Tinned meats were hardly discovered ; the inns were very poor and bad ; and, to crown all, the lack of maps and the ignorance of the country often brought a bivouac high up on the mountains, without shelter or food, to close a successful day with a night of torment. It is true that, if these delights tempt you, you can still experience even greater discomfort on the slopes of Aconcagua or Ushba, on the Hispar Pass, or among the forests of the Selkirks ; but this means money and time ; or, if you have neither, you can climb without guides and sleep in tents, an arrangement which secures the maximum of risk with the minimum of enjoyment. For the rest of us nothing remains but a Tom Sawyer-like existence, brightened by the fact that there is an inn an hour below our bivouac, hay beds tempered by air-cushions, and tough mutton accompanied by *pâté de foie gras*.

All these things are against us ; and yet I will dare to say that, for myself, and for all who, through



painful and devious ways, have come to know the mountains, their grimness, their joy, no scrap of romance, or love, or reverence has fallen from them. Still remains the intense feeling of delight in your own strength—just as intense in the weak as in the strong—which those only can know who have crawled along a ridge so slender that it seems only to remain in place because it cannot make up its mind on which side to fall, on days when nature seems to take a malign delight in thwarting the climber, and when you must cling tight to disintegrating stones to prevent yourself going off with the wind into a neighbouring valley ; days when you find at six in the evening that the old route off the glacier has been spoiled by the collapse of an ice-bridge, and you must wearily cut your way up the icefall again, hoping against hope that you may be on the path before dark ; the wild excitement on a broken arête, perhaps not often accomplished before, as you turn or climb over great tower after tower and see a fresh succession between you and the summit, each apparently toppling to its fall, and asking nothing better than to take you with it ; the very unpleasant feeling down your spine as you watch the leading man grappling with the tower immediately before you, raising himself with wondrous skill foot by foot, and hear the scratching and shifting of his bootnails on the rock as he gains each fearful inch. It is perfectly

true that the strength in which you exult so much is that of the two large peasants, who, with excitable cries in patois, are communicating to each other their very uncomplimentary opinion of the rocks and of your own powers as a climber, and preparing to pull you, as a sack of oats, with a painful sense of constriction in the stomach, up the rocks which the leader has surmounted, in spite of your entreaties to be allowed to do it without help. ‘Herr Jesu,’ said my master on the little Dru, ‘Sie sagen immer “Ich komme gleich” und Sie kommen nicht. Jetzt müssen Sie kommen,’ and with a vigorous haul I accomplished ten feet of ascent. But when you reach green grass again all the moral support will have been forgotten in the flush of victory, and by the time the Bouvier flows you will be a hero in your own eyes, in those of your female relatives, and on the tongues of those expert flatterers who despised you so heartily a few hours ago.

Their point of view is a singularly complex one ; the ordinary guide is as brave as a Boer, and his bravery has many of the same peculiarities. He has very little sense of sport ; he is ever conscious of the desperate danger of his calling, and, while he is willing and anxious to meet any risk which comes in the necessary course of events, he has the greatest contempt for the man who seeks the bright eyes of danger for their own sake. He is a bit of a fatalist.

‘ See,’ said one, as we brought down the bodies of a party who had died in a place as simple as Piccadilly, ‘ death can come as easily on a light mountain as a difficult one.’ And again, when the French guides bungled at their task : ‘ Those Arolla men know nothing of accidents ; for me, when a man is once dead, I will carry him as soon as a sheep,’ and so saying he put one of the things on his head and strode down into the valley to where the mules waited for their burden. A guide of experience will tell you that there are only three dangers in mountaineering : falling stones, sudden bad weather, and the tourist. And of these three he regards the last with the most suspicion, and with good reason. Ordinary foresight can immensely reduce the risk of being caught in a storm ; you can avoid falling stones by the simple process of not going where they fall ; but nothing can guard against the eccentricities of the brilliant climber. The novice is a source of danger because he goes slowly, tires the party out, and upsets stones on to the heads of those below ; but he is not more likely to slip than the piece of luggage which he represents in his guides’ mind, and if he did, he would be held instantly, so closely is he watched. But the man with enough experience to have ideas of his own on difficulties, and enough technical skill to master them unaided, is a constant anxiety. He will move when he ought to stay quiet ;

he insists on risky experiments ; he resents the pressure of the rope when it is necessary for the safety of the whole party ; he refuses help in times of stress. This, above all, is a state of mind incomprehensible to the guide, who always takes a pull if he wants it from his leader, and sometimes from an amateur.

I am always tempted to dwell at length upon the characteristics of the guide, because they seem to me to be very opposite to those usually attributed to him. When you first see him, a fine big man, rough in manner but with much charm and *savoir-faire* ; when you first adventure yourself with him on such perilous passages as the Mer de Glace from the Montanvert to the Chapeau, or the desperate glories of the Breithorn ; when, sick and weary from your first real expedition, he coaxes you to eat and half carries you into the valley ; when your jokes are greeted with uproarious applause ; when you are told you go like a chamois and will soon equal the feats of Herr Whymper or Herr ‘ Momery ’, you begin to think him ‘ a thin red ’ero ’ with a fine eye for a man and a nice discernment of character. And when your acquaintance progresses and you find your comrade is saying the same thing to your neighbour at table d’hôte, who is, as you well know, a shirker and a humbug ; when Johann or Peter or Heinrich snores in a horrible fashion in the hut and



likes to carry the brandy flask and turns out a shrewd fellow at a bargain ; above all, when, like a good tutor, he begins to pay you the greatest compliment a guide can pay, and ceases to compliment at all, you begin to wonder whether he is not a bit of a blackguard. In truth he is neither ' 'ero ' nor blackguard, but a married man in rough Saas homespun, woven by Mrs. Johann, 'most remarkable' like any other peasant. He is of a saving turn of mind, for he has several children already and one more every year. He has a sheep or two, a cow or two, and a floor with several rooms in the big wooden house down by the bridge on the path to Findelen, which he built, in company with his brothers and brothers-in-law, in the winter with his own hands, having some mysterious rights to the land from his position in the Gemeinde and buying the materials out of his first two seasons' savings as a fashionable guide. He is, or ought to be, insured in the Zürcher Versicherungs Verein, with the assistance of the Swiss Alpine Club, for the sum of 4,000 francs. His chief delight is to hang large decorated cow-bells round the necks of his best cows, and, if you take him to Chamonix, he will buy them there, and then carry them with infinite labour over passes and peaks until he reaches Swiss territory again, so that if you chance to run down to Orsières you go accompanied by music from his knapsack, like the fine lady of

Banbury Cross. His anxiety is to escape military service until September is half gone, and the climbing season with it ; and then, with the first sign of real bad weather, he goes quietly down to Sion, with the gendarme, who has been awaiting his convenience for many days in the trink-halle, surrenders to the authorities, and does his fortnight's prison, hoping, if he is very lucky indeed, that there may be fine weather and a stray tourist in October when he comes home again. He is extraordinarily peaceful by disposition, even in his cups, and, on the whole, extraordinarily sober ; for, though there is said to be a great deal of drinking in Zermatt in the winter, and there certainly is among Oberlanders at all times, yet I have, in the course of about 200 expeditions, great and small, only once been out with a guide who was really drunk, and he, though he bore a German name, came from an Italian valley.

All these are somewhat hasty generalizations. I have, in the course of one long season, climbed with a guide who bore the name of one of the oldest families in the Valais, spent the winter in eating his dinners at the Geneva bar, always carried a white shirt to change into in the evening, cleaned his teeth at the first stream we came to in the morning (using his leather drinking-cup as a tooth-glass), took a great interest in English politics, and is now member for his native village in the Cantonal Parliament ;

with the drunken gentleman mentioned above ; with a man who was a platelayer by trade, earning about 10 francs a week, and who died a year or two later in a famous accident on the Lyskamm ; with the President of an Eastern Guides Association—a burgher of the village, who neither drinks nor smokes, and, I should think, earns about £18 a week in the season ; with an Italian who spoke French, German, and Italian, and who, until he obtained some celebrity as a guide, used to go every winter to Breslau as a stonemason ; and with another man of the same race, the most perfectly fashioned athlete and the most courageous and graceful cragsman I have ever seen. Both surpassed every Switzer in sporting instinct and dash, and both were a little too fond of fancy climbing for a family man.

I have tried to sketch the kind of companion you may secure at 7 francs a day retaining fee with 45 for a peak or 20 for a pass ; I will now conduct you personally on an expedition. Some years ago I was waiting at Zermatt, with the Geneva bar-student, for a good chance for the Dent Blanche, a mountain that then enjoyed a high reputation for difficulty. The weather had been fair, but didn't mean to remain so long. Still one thing after another caused us to delay ; now the fact that I wanted training ; now that on a particular day there was another party on the mountain ; until at last, one evening after

dinner, we decided, in a moment of inspiration, that the weather was about to break and that it was to-morrow or never. This implied doing it straight out from Zermatt, a feat which no one had been born idiot enough to attempt before; and it also implied the discovery of a second guide who should have explored a certain short cut, then little known, though now it is the invariable route. As we formed our resolution at eight and were to be off at one, we had a good deal of trouble in the search, and at last—to make the expedition more harebrained than it was before—were obliged to engage a guide who had been out eighteen hours that very day in an ascent of the same mountain.

I spare you the recital of the agony of spirit which I endured when I was rudely awakened at midnight. We packed up sullenly and sleepily and issued into the night. In that mood of reserve which one learns to associate with the hours when ‘Maiden, still the morn is, and cold is she, and secret,’ and which may arise from intimate communion with Nature and a yearning to be alone with her, or from the fact that one has had only three hours’ sleep, we stumbled up the well-remembered paths. But as we passed the Staffel and entered upon that desolate waste which is called by courtesy the Zmutt Glacier, it was obvious that part of my little army had celebrated the victory of the previous day with fitting



ceremony. He brought me along at a tremendous pace ; while behind came the bar-student, grave, silent, and disapproving.

The day broke wondrously from Gabelhorn to Matterhorn, gilding and staining with blood and then passing through every gradation of colour until air, rocks, and ice were soaked and splashed and filled with sunlight bright and clear. But we pressed on into the dark recesses of the Wandfluh, and when we touched the rocks and the gentle incline gave place to a steep but easy climb, my leader's pace began to moderate. We seemed to halt more often than was quite prudent in those gullies ; every trickle of water was pronounced to be the last we should find on the mountain, and must be made the most of with the help of the contents of a great wooden cask, holding six bottles, which was slung outside his knapsack, even when the stones all round us gave warning that bits of the mountain fell continuously down that face on to the little Schönbühl Glacier. As we ascended the halts became more frequent and more prolonged, and the signs of distress more obvious ; until, when we reached the mountain, and the day's work was about to begin, our pressed man could go no further. We had had about nine hours' grind, the fun only remained, and I could have cried from disappointment. But my Man of Laws proved himself worthy of the occasion. To get a thoroughly

incompetent amateur up those last thousands of feet was a fine performance, but he accomplished it. We left almost all the provisions and the cask with our laggard, though not without misgivings, and went on. After you once reach the summit ridge of the Dent Blanche you follow it all the way to the top, only leaving it where a great gendarme, or rock tower, stands up and seems to forbid further progress. This you may climb over, but the more usual way goes round it on the left by slabby rocks, very steep, with little handhold ; this traverse requires three men with a hundred feet of rope for perfect safety ; it is the only real difficulty on the mountain, and it was here that four well-known English climbers were caught in a thunderstorm and forced to spend the night a few years ago. Somehow we got past it, and then slowly, haltingly, for the racing of the early morning had disorganized me, we worked along, always with the top just hidden and incredibly far off, until, just as incredibly, it was beneath our feet. There was no time for more than a hasty sardine, and we turned. But it was nearly six, seven hours from our parting, before we came again to our Robinson Crusoe. There he sat, where we had left him, too sick at heart and stomach even to touch the dainties which were around him in the snow. He told us he had supposed us long dead. We feasted and jeered at him, and, while the meat was yet in

our mouths, the storm which we had foreseen burst upon us. In thunder, lightning, and rain we hurried down the Wandfluh. In drenching rain, worn out, terrified, with the electricity hissing round us, we stumbled over the dry glacier, over the interminable moraine, and into the forest. Then suddenly a chalet seemed to rise up before us, and we drank and drank of milk. The brilliant idea at once struck the guides of sleeping there in the hay ; but as I was drenched through, and we had nothing to eat or drink but milk, I sternly set my face towards the wilderness. I borrowed the lantern and sallied forth to find myself in a few minutes wandering far off the path in a blackness that seemed palpable. I heard a welcome shout, and they were after me. The rest of the walk passed like a pleasant dream ; it still rained, one fell down every three steps ; after a little the second guide gave it up. I suppose he roosted in some cow-shed. But one's brains had long ceased to act when the black masses in front of one suddenly became houses, and Jost was taking away one's ice-axe, and one was dripping in one's own bedroom, with the hot bath steaming, and the champagne and soup on the table, and the promise that the steak had been put on as we reached the hotel. It was eleven o'clock. I still had to describe the day's doings to Jost, and then, after the feast, to bed. I lighted my pipe, but I found it under the bed the

next morning, and the candle burnt out. So I suppose I did not smoke much.

This history illustrates sufficiently the danger of an impetuous Herr, and of expeditions undertaken on the eve of bad weather. Its idiocy is perhaps redeemed by the fact that I had, at any rate, the benefit of the best professional advice and assistance ; but no such excuse can be advanced for the following adventure, which I relate because in its inception, its surroundings, and its failure it presents so complete a contrast to our ill-deserved success.

Far, far from Zermatt and fashionable peaks and semi-fashionable hotels, hidden in a corner of the Italian hills, lies a little town hemmed round with vines and olives, and set so deep between such precipitous slopes that you cannot see from its miniature piazza even the edge of the plateau from which rise the great peaks. But, all your way to where they burst upon you, you go through under-wood and cover, which is Italian, and over pastures which are fresher than the stone-strewn meadows of the northern slopes. Through such paths walked our party one August evening, with the applause and respectful homage of the country folk, until we came to where, about an hour above the last chalets, the mountain himself had arranged a stream for us and a smooth green meadow, cropped close by the goats, where we might pitch our tents. I know no



such camping-ground in all the Pennines, save perhaps by the Lac de Combal ; there is a smooth sward for two Mummery tents, a heap of stones to serve as a stand for the cooking things by night and a shelter for the tents by day. Milk comes daily from the cowherds at the Alp, and your porters can carry you up loaves of bread from time to time if you find the resources of the Army and Navy Stores insufficient for your appetites. You are among pines ; the glacier is at your tent door and the mountain above you. Here we sojourned certain days, and when I had fallen into the torrent, and dried myself and my clothes over an etna, and our stock of self-cooking tins was becoming exhausted, and our beards were becoming prickly, and, generally speaking, a return to civilization was indicated, we determined to adventure ourselves on the great assault. Our party consisted of an admirable step-cutter, a first-class rock-climber, a gentleman who was capable of reading the Italian Government map in a high wind, and myself, who, as I have no very obvious qualifications, must have been intended by Providence as the historian of the expedition. We knew nothing whatever of our mountain except that it is usual to go up it on another side, and none of us but myself had ever seen it from a less distance than a hundred miles. So one morning we packed up our camp carefully for the porters to carry away, and sallied out ' to

travel the uncharted'. All went well until we reached the foot of the usual glacis which slopes down from the ridge. My timidity had exacted a pledge that, if we found this slope ice, we should return; but when we reached the spot it was very plausibly argued that any one might have known that it must be ice all the time, which indeed was the truth, and that we should find fine practice in cutting up it. As I was not the step-cutter, and was desperately short-winded, I did not discuss the point, and we proceeded. We got over the bergschrund somehow. But even the step-cutter found the job a tough one, and there were several changes in the leadership before we reached the top. There are many situations in mountaineering when it becomes a duty as well as a pleasure to point out to our companions how far they fall short of the best standard of form, how necessary it is to keep the rope taut, to keep the full distance, and to move with certainty. But I think our complaints to one another of our shortcomings were on this day due to the very unpleasant place in which we were, and to our assurance that every member of the party but the complainant was the direct cause of the steepness of the mountain, of the hardness of the ice, of the tendency of the rope to entangle itself with the little knobbly rocks which embellish the slope, and of the fact that every now and then a big or a small

stone would break away from the mountain and, in relentless silence, slip past some member of the party and hide itself in loud disgust at its failure in the crevasse below. I was the most querulous, not only because I was the passenger and had most breath to complain with, but also because my crampons, which I was wearing for the first time, hurt my feet, and helped on a gentle frost-bite. The others did the work, and bore my reproaches with apparent equanimity ; but they also spoke a word or two.

At last we reached the ridge, and then, though it was already late and the clouds were gathering, resolved that the stones made a return impossible and set out to find a route back to our village over the peak itself. One ridge is very much like another, and so was this—only easier. There were rocks, very easy rocks, and slopes of snow which were very gentle, and every now and then there was a little bit of ice ; unhappily the ice became more frequent and the clouds thicker, until at 3.30 the wind suddenly bared the mountain-top an obvious hour away, and simultaneously a valley on our right, deep, unknown, romantic, but gay with streams and a great herd of cows. Mournfully we turned to our way of salvation ; but the darkness was almost upon us before we cleared the glacier. Where we were we knew not ; the hills made a huge sweep which all but shut in the pasture, surely the greenest and most

pleasant pasture in all Italy ; down the middle went the stream from the glaciers of our mountain, but more placidly than is the wont of mountain streams, for the pasture scarcely shelves until it comes to the edge of the great step in the mountain-side over which it suddenly careers to the narrower gorge below. Down there, I believe—the map says so—is an Italian bathing-place, and you may fancy the pleasant clatter and chatter of the guests, and their toylike habitation. But no sound or suggestion of such a profanation comes up the glen to this spacious solitude.

There we found a herd—a boy who, I think, was Pan himself ; he understood no human language and he appeared to herd no cows. But he played upon a pipe, and he led us gravely down, as befitted brother gods from the hills, to where we found the Alp itself and the operation of milking, and two natives, with whom he left us. They were mildly courteous, disbelieved our story, and provided us with milk to assist in the disposal of our half-tin of potted meat, our sole remaining food. Then they showed us the bed in the hay, tucked us in with the plank to prevent us falling into the kitchen, and remained sitting on the ground all night that the strangers might lie soft. They were the most incredulous and the most charming of hosts.

This story requires no comment.



It is a matter of tradition that all papers on sport, and above all on Alpine sport, should comprise an apology, in the strict sense of the word, and an eloquent praise of the noblest of all pastimes. And yet defences of any form of sport are at once unnecessary and impossible. Impossible because, I suppose, all forms of sport, from love-making to war, are indefensible against the assaults of the logician; unnecessary, because sport, like history, has a way of justifying herself. But there is one charge against this sport, first urged with all the eloquence, and pressed home with all the vehemence, of the great prophet of the mountains, and since echoed with his mouth or pen by every one who loves nature. You have been, say the critics, among the inner fortresses of nature, and have made them a dumping-ground for empty potted meat tins; you have walked with death and morning on the silver horns, and they have been to you as greased poles; there has never fallen on your spirit the shadow of the mountain gloom, or the infinite splendour of the mountain glory; but, 'red with the cutaneous eruption of self-conceit,' you have sprawled unheeding in the pleasant pastures and trodden down the flowers. Your literature resounds with the popping of champagne corks, and is barren of style, and sense, and beauty. And your minds are as barren as your writings.

There are as many defences to this indictment as had the Irishman who was accused of stealing a kettle. But the root of the matter is this. The charm of the hills is as incommunicable as it may be deeply felt. Mountaineers are no more insensible than the Master himself of the beauty of the view from the lagoon of the 'wilderness of misty precipices fading far back into the recesses of Cadore', but to write of it needs the hand of the Master himself, and 'it needs heaven-sent moments for the skill'. Mountains seem so elusive, their colours, even their shapes, so evanescent, that the memory retains rather an impression than a photograph; and the efforts of the greatest to transfer the results to canvas or to paper have alike failed. Hence, perhaps, a somewhat boisterous merriment; a lack of form in writings which have come into being as the result rather of high spirits than of a melancholy delight in words; and a shutting of the door upon those aesthetic emotions which we have not felt ourselves worthy to unbar. Yet because we have lost the first fine careless rapture of the young ladies' school, who gaze for the first time upon the Mer de Glace, we must not be supposed to be blind or soulless. Like most English people we are a diffident folk, and consider any emotion vulgar which is shared by any one else.

But we have our treasures of the past though we fear to show them. Who that has ever seen them

can forget the San Martino giants—huge yet unsubstantial—glimmering at sunrise, like ghosts, over woods as dark and meadows as fresh as those can only be which slope towards Italy ; the sudden uprising of the western world, peak after peak, spear-head after spearhead, like the waves of the sea in tumultuous order, terrible as an army with banners, as your head reaches at length the ridge before you, and instead of the snow slope and the shadow which you have seen so long, you gaze over the watershed of the Western Pennines ; the kingdoms of the earth and the fullness thereof spread out before you, green and hot to the Jura, deep and cool to the little St. Bernard, from Mont Blanc himself ; the great circle of the wall which keeps in Italy, seen from the Engadine Mountains in a half-moon with Monte Rosa at the end literally ‘ hanging there ’ over in the haze ; above all, perhaps, the limitless space of the same plain from the Central Pennines, fading away to a darker line, perhaps with a high light of silver, which is the Apennines, while in the middle distance a tremulous grey cloud is Maggiore, and you can almost believe the fancy which tells you that the brighter spot is Milan, sparkling like a grain of salt ?

To such a day succeeds the incomparable pomp of eve, and when the sun has passed down into the tangles of the French foothills, and the peaks, each

a separate sun now he is gone, have burnt out in turn, one by one, through every variety of colour, night, marching slowly but visibly from a hundred miles away, hushes the streams and hangs her own jewels in the heavens. You have at once a darkness and a brilliancy which you have learned to associate only with the tropics. The shadows are blacker for you, and the stars closer than for the plain dwellers, and night 'doth like an Aethiop bride appear'. Very reluctantly you knock out your last pipe and creep into your blankets, leaving the moon full over the Rutor.

But the dark days have their triumphs too, when a cloud is snatched away for an instant as a garment and you see the next tower on the ridge, fantastic, horrible; or the Matterhorn, or the Dru, suddenly reveals itself from base to summit, as detached from earth to heaven, majestic in the mist.

As for praise, those who have found in the pursuit those glories which restricted opportunity, lack of skill, some defect in hand or eye, have denied them in the more obvious sports of Englishmen, will never be able to explain or tell their gratitude. But the Alps are more than a gymnasium for their lover. Always alluring though they flout you; always lovely though they frown upon you; always dear though they slay you; they give you strength, and



friends, and happiness, and to have known and loved them is indeed a liberal education :

Is it so small a thing  
To have enjoy'd the sun,  
To have lived light in the spring,  
To have lived, to have thought, to have done,  
To have advanced true friends and beat down  
baffling foes ?

## THE CUP AND THE LIP

MISADVENTURE filled more than its fair share of space in early Alpine literature, partly because the mildly horrible has its own fascination, partly because even the mountaineer can find something not entirely displeasing in the benightments of his friends, partly because failure is, on the whole, more picturesque—or, at least, more suitable for fine writing—than success. I do not speak of serious accidents—*maiores maiora canant*; for accounts of these, and receipts for their avoidance also, you may search not in vain in any Alpine library—but of the little roll down a snowslope, the little blow from a stone, the moment's peril when the snow-bridge breaks, the long hours of the unpremeditated bivouac and the twinges of rheumatism by which through long years you will retain its memory, of all those little slips and falls which complete the climber's 'rake's progress' and turn him from a callow youth with coloured tops to his stockings, who dallies with pretty bits of climbing and has a taste for carrying his own knapsack, into the scarred and bearded veteran who appreciates the moral support of the rope and plods obediently and unburdened after his veteran guide. To tell of such adventures was the joy of the writers

of forty years ago ; and Mr. Kennedy's night adventures on the Bristenstock, Mr. Whymper's fall on the Tête du Lion and his account of Reynaud's involuntary leap on the Col de la Pilatte, and the delightful indiscretions of Mr. Girdlestone have long ago passed beyond the fury of the leader-writers, who saw in each a fresh instance of the audacious wickedness of man, into the calm region of the classics. ' Theirs was the giant race before the flood ' of pamphlets, magazine articles, and sober volumes bound in aniline-dyed cloth had dulled the popular palate and made it necessary to seek a newer world for him who would take his heroism to the best market. If we slip nowadays we don't tell about it. Yet even in these days, when the purchase of an axe at Anderegg's and a few nails at Andenmatten's will make you a mountaineer in the few hours between the arrival of the English mail and the grotesque time at which you will be rudely bidden to arise on the following morning—even in these days I fancy that you will suffer many a rough knock before you reach the seats of the mighty in Savile Row. Some few there be, mighty athletes from their youth up, who take the sport by storm and seem to escape the chances of us ordinary creatures ; but for the most of us the craft is long to learn, the conquering hard. And in the experience of many there are two distinct phases. There is the time when, flushed with youth and

victory, you seem to go on from strength to strength, faster from year to year, more confident in foot and hand, more scornful of the rope which you have seen so often used, not as a means of safety, but as an assistance to the progression of the weaker brethren, until one day your foot unaccountably finds the step too small, or the bit of rock comes away in your hand, or the outraged spirit of the mountains smites you suddenly with a stone, and all is changed. Henceforth every well-worn and half-despised precaution has a new meaning for you ; it becomes a point of honour to walk circumspectly, to turn the rope round every helpful projection when the leader moves, and to mark and keep your distance ; and you begin to catch a little of the wisdom of our fathers. It is not until the slip comes—as it comes to all—that you believe a slip is possible ; and were it not for slips the continual advance of cup to lip might become in time monotonous and irksome, and mountaineering nothing but a more laborious and elaborate form of walking up a damp flight of stairs. But when it has come, and there has passed away the result of the consequent shock to your self-esteem, and to other even more sensitive portions of your person, there succeeds a new pride of achievement, and you will have the advantages of the converted sinner over the ninety and nine just persons whose knickerbockers are still unriven. Furthermore, you will have



commenced the graduate stage of your mountaineering education. Unlucky, too, will you be if your experience has not given you something more than a juster estimate of your own moral and physical excellence ; for your misfortune, if you have chosen your companions aright, will suddenly turn your grumbling hireling into a friend as gentle and as patient as a nurse, and disclose in those who were your friends qualities of calm and steadfastness, never revealed in the fret of the valley ; while, if you need wine and oil for your wounds, when you reach home again, you will find in the inn some English doctor, asking nothing better than to devote the best part of his holiday to the gratuitous healing of the stranger.

The form of my own awakening was not such as to require wine or oil or consolation, and indeed, had I spoken of it at the time, would have scarcely escaped ridicule. We had reached the summit of our pass, and the guides and myself had decided that the steep wall of snow on the further side was an admirable place for a glissade. Accordingly we went through the inevitable ritual of the summit, consumed as much sour bread and wine as we could, with unerring inaccuracy applied the wrong names to all the newly disclosed mountain-tops, adjusted the rope and prepared for the descent. Unfortunately we omitted to explain the particular form of

pleasure in which we were about to indulge to my companion, who was ignorant alike of mountaineering and the German tongue. The result was simple : the second guide, who was in front, set off with his feet together and his axe behind him ; I followed in as correct an imitation of his attitude as I could induce my body to assume ; but the novice stood still on the crest of the pass to ‘await in fitting silence the event’, and the rope tightened. The jerk, after nearly cutting me in two, laid me on my back in the snow, and was then transmitted to the guide, who was also pulled off his feet and plunged head foremost down. Our combined weights drew after us both my companion and the chief guide, who was taken unawares, and both came crushing upon me. We rolled over and over, mutually pounding one another as we rolled ; hats and spectacles and axes preceded us, and huge snowballs followed in our wake, until, breathless and humiliated, we had cleared the *schrund*, and come to an ignominious halt on the flat snow below.

This was no very rude introduction to my climbing deficiencies, but before the end of the season I had felt fear at the pit of my stomach. We (that is A. T. and myself) had scrambled up an Austrian mountain, and, on our way down, had come to where the little glacier intervenes between the precipice and the little moraine heaps above the forest. The glacier

would hardly deserve the name in any other part of the Alps, so small is it ; but it makes up for what it lacks in size by its exceeding steepness, the hardness of its ice, and the ferocity (if one may attribute personal characteristics to Nature) of the rock walls which keep in its stream on either hand, hem it in so closely that I think it must be always in deep shadow, even in the middle of a June day.

Here you must cross it very nearly on a level, and then skirt down its further side between ice and rock for a few feet before you come to a suitable place for the crossing of the big crevasse below you ; and then a short slide down old avalanche débris shoots you deliciously into the sun again. The crossing of the glacier in the steps cut by the numerous parties who have passed on previous days is an extremely simple affair. But you must not hurry, for a slip could not be checked, and would probably finish in the before-mentioned crevasse. We started, however, in some fear ; for a party ascending the mountain favoured us with continual showers of stones of all sizes, and the higher they climbed the more viciously came their artillery. Hence I was nervous and apt to go carelessly when we reached the middle of the ice, and here the worse began. I heard a strange, whizzing, whirring noise, which sounded strangely familiar, accompanied by a physical shiver on my part and a curious knocking together of the

knees ; again and again it came, followed each time by a slight dull thud ; and, looking at the rocks below us on each side, I saw a little white puff of dust rising at every concussion. Then I knew why the sound seemed familiar. I was reminded how, as a panting schoolboy, I had toiled up a long dusty road to a certain down with a rifle much too large for me, in the vain hope of shooting my third-class, and how, as we bruised our shoulders at the 200 yards' range, another young gentleman firing at the 400 yards at the parallel range on the left, had mistaken his mark and fired across our heads at the target beyond us on the right. Everything was present : the indescribable whirring of the bullet, its horrible invisibility while it flew, and the grey little cloud as it flattened itself on the white paint of the target. The sensation was horrible, the tendency to hurry irresistible, and but for my companion I should have risked slip and crevasse and everything to get out of the line of fire. But my companion remained absolutely steady ; while he poured forth curses in every language and every patois ever spoken in the Italian Tyrol, he still moved his feet as deliberately, improved the steps with as much care and minuteness as if he were a Chamonix guide conducting a Frenchman on the Mer de Glace. I know he felt the position as acutely as I did, for when, a week later, we had to cross the same place under a similar



fire, and the third member of the party was sent on in front with a large rope to re-cut the steps, he turned to me with impressive simplicity and said '*Adesso è quello in grande pericolo*. If he is hit, we cannot save him.' How long we took to cross I do not know. But when at last we reached the other bank we cast the rope off with one impulse, and, bending under the shelter of the rocks, ran where I had found climbing hard in the morning, jumped the *bergschrand*, fell and rolled down the snow under a final volley from the mountain, and lay long by the stream panting and safe.

I suspect the danger here was far more apparent than real. My next adventure with a falling stone was more real than I like to think of. Four of us had been scrambling round the rocks beside the Ventina Glaciér, and were returning to our camp to lunch. By bad luck, as it turned out, I reached level ground first, and, lying on my back amongst great boulders, watched with amusement the struggles of my companions who were about a hundred feet above me, apparently unable to get up or down. They were screaming to me, but the torrent drowned their voices, and I smoked my pipe in contentment. *Suave mari magno*. At last they moved, and with them the huge rock which they had been endeavouring to uphold and shouting to me to beware of. It crashed down towards me, but I determined to stop where

I was. The roughness of the ground would have hindered my escape to any distance, and I calculated on stepping quickly aside when my enemy had declared himself for any particular path of attack. So I did, but the stone at that moment broke in pieces, and, quick as I was with desperation, one fragment was quicker still. It caught me, glancing as I turned, between the shoulder and the elbow, only just touching me, as I suppose, for the bone was quite unhurt. Up I went into the air and down I came among the stones, with all the wind knocked out of me, large bruises all over me, not hurt, but very much frightened.

Such experiences as this leave no very lasting impression, and might just as easily happen were the party accompanied by the best of guides. But I hardly think that any guide would have been crack-brained enough to take part in two expeditions which taught me what it feels like to slip on rock and ice respectively. The first slip took place during the winter. With one companion I was climbing in a long and not very difficult gully on a Welsh mountain. The frost had just broken, and there was more water in the pitches than was quite pleasant. It was very cold water, and my hands, which had been frost-bitten the week before, were still swathed in bandages. Hence progress was very slow, and at last my friend took the lead to spare me. He was

climbing over a big overhanging stone jammed between the walls of the gully and forming an excellent spout for the water, which was thus poured conveniently down his neck. I stood on the shelving floor of the gully in perfect safety, and watched the shower-bath, which was gradually exhausting him. He asked for his axe, and I, in a moment of madness, came near and handed it up ; his legs, which were all I could then see of him, were kicking in the water about five feet above my head. What happened next I do not know, but I shall always maintain that, seeing an eligible blade of grass above him, he plunged the adze in and hauled with both hands. The blade resented such treatment and came out. Anyhow he fell on my head, and we commenced a mad career down the way we had ascended, rather rolling than falling, striking our heads and backs against the rocks, and apparently destined for the stony valley upon which we had looked down between our legs for hours. People who have escaped drowning say that, in what was their struggle for life, their minds travelled back over their whole history. I know that my brain at this moment suddenly acquired an unusual strength. In a few seconds we were safe, but in those seconds there was time for centuries of regret. There was no fear ; that was to come later. But I felt vividly that I was present as a spectator of my own suicide, and thought

myself a feeble kind of fool. Had it been on the Dru or the Meije, I thought, it might have been worth it, but, half-drowned, to plunge a poor forty feet over the next pitch on a hill not 3,000 feet high, with a carriage-road in sight, and a girl driving in the cows for milking in Nant Francon ! And at the same time there came back a curious scrap from *Richard III*, learnt at my private school and never apprehended—

Lord, Lord, methought, what pain it was to  
drown,

What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears !

We did not roll far, and stuck between the walls of the gully, where they narrowed. Then I arose and shook myself, unhurt. My companion made me light his pipe, which cheered me very much, and we each partook of an enormous mutton sandwich. Help was near, for another party of three was climbing in the next gully, and came to our shouts ; one ran down to the farm for a hurdle, the rest began the descent. For hours we seemed to toil, for my companion, though with admirable fortitude he supported the pain of movement, had temporarily no power over his legs and the lower part of his body. I could do little, but the others worked like blacks, and just at dark we reached the farm, and the ministrations of a Welsh doctor, who told my friend, quite erroneously, that there was nothing the matter with him,



pointed out a swelling on my face as big as a pigeon's egg, which, he said, would probably lead to erysipelas, and then departed into the darkness.

A fall on ice has something in it more relentless, though, until the last catastrophe, less violent. We had all been victims to the fleshpots of the valley, and were perhaps hardly fit for a long ice slope when we began to cut up the last few feet to gain the arête of our mountain. The incline seemed to me very steep, and, third on the rope, I was watching the leader at his labours, half pitying him for his exertions, half envying him his immunity from the ice fragments which he was sending down to me. Below me the fourth man had barely left the great flat rock on which we had breakfasted ; there was no reason to think of danger ; when to my horror I saw the leader cut a step, put out his foot slowly, and then very slowly and deliberately sway over and fall forwards and downwards against the ice. We were in a diagonal line, but almost immediately beneath one another, and he swung quietly round like a pendulum, his axe holding him to the slope, until he was immediately beneath the second man. Very slowly, as it seemed, the rope grew taut ; the weight began to tug at his waist ; and then he, too, slowly and reflectively in the most correct mountaineering attitude, as though he were embarking upon a well-considered journey, began to slide. Now was the

time for me to put into practice years of patient training. I dug my toes in and stiffened my back, anchored myself to the ice, and waited for the strain. It was an unconscionable time coming, and, when it came, I still had time to think that I could bear it. Then the weight of twenty-seven stone in a remorseless way quietly pulled me from my standpoint, as though my resistance were an impudence. Still, like the others, I held my axe against the ice and struggled like a cat on a polished floor, always seeing the big flat rock, and thinking of the bump with which we should bound from it and begin our real career through the air ; when suddenly the bump came and we all fell together in a heap on to the rock and the fourth man, who had stepped back upon it, my crampons running into his leg, and my axe, released from the pressure, going off through the air on the very journey which I had anticipated for us all. The others were for a fresh attack on the malicious mountain ; but I was of milder mood, and very soon, torn and wiser, we were off on a slower but more convenient path to the valley than had seemed destined for us a few minutes before. But our cup was not yet full. Having no axe with which to check a slip, I was placed at the head of the line, and led slowly down, floundering a good deal for want of my usual support. The great couloir was seamed across with a gigantic crevasse, the angle of

the slope being so sharp that the upper half overhung, and we had only crossed in the morning by standing on the lower lip, cutting handholes in the upper, and shoving up the leader from the shoulder of the second man : hence, in descending, our position was similar to that of a man on the mantelshelf who should wish to climb down into the fire itself. We chose the obvious alternative of a jump to the curb, which was, I suppose, about fifteen feet below us and made of steep ice with a deep and deceptive covering of snow. I jumped and slid away with this covering, to be arrested in my course by a rude jerk. I turned round indignant ; but my companions were beyond my reproaches. One by one, full of snow, eloquent, and bruised, they issued slowly from the crevasse into which I had hurled them, and, heedless of the humour of the situation, gloomily urged me downwards.

Some hours still passed before we reached our friendly Italian hut, left some days before for a raid into Swiss territory ; there on the table were our provisions and shirts as we had left them, and a solemn array of bottles full of milk carried up during our absence by our shepherd friends ; and there, on the pile, in stinging comment on our late proceedings, lay a slip of paper, the tribute of some Italian tourist, bearing the inscription ‘ *Omaggio ai bravi Inglesi ignoti* ’. We felt very much ashamed.

When the soup has been eaten and the pipes are lighted, and you sit down outside your hut for the last talk before bed, you will find your guides' tongues suddenly acquire a new eloquence, and, if you are a novice at the craft, will be almost overwhelmed by the catalogue of misfortune which they will repeat to you. And so, too, upon us in the winter months comes the temptation to dwell on things done long ago and ill done, and, as we write of the sport for others, we give a false impression of peril and hardihood in things that were little more than matter for a moment's laughter. I too must plead guilty to a well-meant desire to make your flesh creep.

Mountaineering by skilled mountaineers is about as dangerous as hunting in a fair country, and requires about as much pluck as to cross from the Temple to the Law Courts at midday. Difficult mountaineering is for the unskilled about as dangerous as riding a vicious horse in a steeplechase for a man who has never learnt to ride. But the tendency in those who speak or write of it for the outer world who are not mountaineers is to conceal a deficiency of charm of style by an attempt to slog in the melodramatic, and I plead guilty at once.

So we think and write as though to us our passion for the hills were a fancy of the summer, a mere flirtation. Yet no one has lost the first bloom of



his delight in Alpine adventure before the element of sternness has come to mar his memory and bind more closely his affections. You find the mildly Horatian presence of death somewhere near you, and that at a moment when, whatever your age and strength, and whatever your infirmities, you are at the full burst of youth; when Nature has been kindest she has been most capricious, and has flaunted her relentless savagery just when she has bent to kiss you. The weirdest rocks rise from Italian gardens, and the forms of hill seem oldest when you are most exultant—immortal age beside immortal youth. Yet it is not this, ‘the sense of tears’ in things which are not mortal, which must mark your Alpine paths with memories as heavy and as definite as those inscriptions which tell of obscure and sudden death on every hillside, and invite your prayers for the woodcutter and the shepherd. You too will have seen friends go out into the morning whom you have never welcomed home. There is a danger, sometimes encountered recklessly, sometimes ignorantly, but sometimes—hard as it may be to understand the mood—not in the mere spirit of the idle youth, but met with and overcome, or overcoming, in a resolution which knows no pleasure in conquest save when the essay is fierce, and is calmly willing to pay the penalty of failure. While for ourselves we enjoy the struggle none the less because

we have taken every care that we shall win, they freely give all ; and for such there is surely no law. While by every precept and example we impress the old rules of the craft on our companions and our successors, how can we find words of blame for those who have at least paid ~~the~~ the extreme forfeit, and found ' the sleep that is among the lonely hills ' ?

The penalty for failure is death ; not always exacted at the first slip, for Nature is merciful and oftentimes doth relent ; but surely waiting for those who scorn the experience of others and slight her majesty in wilfulness, in ignorance, in the obstinate following of a fancy, in the vain pursuit of notoriety. The rules are known, and those who break them, and by precept and example tempt to break them those whom they should teach, wrong the sport which they profess to love.

In this game as in any other, it should be a point of honour for us not to make the sport more difficult for others, and not to bring unnecessary sorrow upon the peasants, who help us to play it, and upon their families. It should be a point of honour to play the game, and, if disaster comes in playing it, we have, at least, done our best.

## DUCDAME

‘What’s that “ducdame”?’

‘’Tis a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle.’

It cannot be denied that we who take for mistress the morning with her bright eyes and her cold charm put on ourselves a hard servitude. *Adscripti glebae* we toil, empty, cold, wet, torn, dirty, assuming, as if by choice, the consequences of the curse of Adam. The world, ‘clothed in stiff shirt fronts, mystic, wonderful,’ looks on in pity and contempt. The sport is no longer even novel. Everybody has long ago been up everything and looked into every recess. Scheuchzer’s dragons and the lost spirit of Pilate took flight into the mythical vastness of the Pointe des Plines and Mont Iseran at the appearance of the early numbers of the *Alpine Journal*. There is nothing left to do or see or suffer that has not been done and seen and suffered, and, worst of all, described a thousand times.

So might he say who came down aching with the last few hundred feet into some village of Savoy or Central Switzerland to find the band playing, the beer-drinkers drinking beer, and his luggage lost. But it is only in such moments that he may say it,

and the reality is vastly different. And yet how is he to justify himself and his three days' beard? Of all the vain tasks which we set ourselves, surely the vainest is to set out to explain why we like things. The truth is that we don't know why, and if we did we oughtn't to tell.

'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.

Man, however, or middle-class twentieth-century man, is an apologetic animal. If the public will not sit in judgement upon him, he must perform the office for himself. It cannot be harmful to inquire 'What is this pursuit which we follow?' as some preliminary to the issue 'What limits, other than those which are set by individual hardihood, are to be placed upon it; how far without impiety may we press our adventure?' The question in each individual case must be answered by the individual man. He cannot come less well equipped for the answer by some consideration of first principles.

First, then, mountaineering is, in basis, walking. Of every day that we spend in the mountains the greater part by far is occupied by the exercise of mechanically raising our bodies or lowering them by the mere movement of our legs and feet. And of all banausic exercises, surely free walking is the dullest. The mountaineer feels this to the utter-



most, for at the smallest and most uncomfortable excuse he takes to any other form of getting over the ground. I have even known him take a mule. He knows that if walking is to be made possible to him, some necessity must be added. He cannot be free but bound to a task, or his freedom will not be apparent. He must come into competition, not indeed with other men, but with the forces of Nature, and use walking as a means of overcoming the weapons of his grim antagonists, wind, stone, and time.

But rules, in such a matter, are only the sublimation of experience, and the rules vary as we know more and according to the strength and skill of each of us. There was a time when 'three on a rope at least' was a maxim which it needed the temper of a heretic to disobey. There was another when guideless climbing was hardly to be named among us. For my own part, I have long concluded that on many mountains two is the ideal number for a party, and that the risk, even on a snow-covered glacier, is compensated by the greater speed attained. For guideless climbing my own experiences are too disastrous to enable me to judge calmly. If you can keep in fair training all the year and have a natural turn for guiding and a knack for step-cutting, you will find that it gives you many pleasures denied to us. But I notice that it produces a certain air of

seriousness which suits ill with a holiday temper. I like to take my pleasures more carelessly. As to all rules, let this be said, 'You cant buy experience with another man's money, but then havin' to pay for it, he will do best wot gets it for least.'

The generation which came immediately before us, conceiving rules as things immutable and graven in the heavens, discovered a moral obliquity in breaking them. Perhaps there was some confusion in their reasoning. They were at any rate right in this. It is much easier to bring an expedition to an unsuccessful than to a successful end. And the most obvious sign of an unsuccessful party is that it should never return at all. This is, like all tests, fallible, but it is at least final. Put aside all the hideous circumstance of an Alpine disaster, all the sentiment, all the discomfort to neighbours and the grief to friends, this essential fact remains, in the great majority of cases, that there has been, at least, some miscalculation of means to ends, some heedless Balaclava business carrying some condemnation even in our tears.

Not that any of us are blameless. Mountaineering is a rough game in which we must look out for knocks. Ladies take their fair share, but it is a long way from being—to quote Mr. Jorrocks again—'a werry nice ladylike amusement'. Not that we are always, or even often, on the stretch. We are to think very

much of danger but very little about it. We take our precautions automatically, but the true spirit is not to be just on the edge of safety. We are to be glad to strive; but it would be mere sensationalism to be always smacking our lips at an escape.

Mountaineering then is the art of conveying ourselves with the least exertion and danger up and down among those hills which by reason of steepness or of being snow-covered demand some greater degree of skill and exertion than the ordinary open country, involving some element of risk, but only so much as can be overcome by training, experience, and care, and rejecting all such aids as can be furnished by machinery or animals other than man. All the other things are incidental. As in life generally, it is the incidents which give the charm.

There is a joy incontestable in mere physical action. To put your hands on the top of a wall and lightly to attain is excellent in itself. If you do it thirteen thousand feet above the sea and find yourself on the wall of the world, it is more excellent still. There is a physical joy in the long swinging descent, feet and hands obeying with precision the half expressed commands of your brain. It is the more excellent that you swing down into the unknown. Thus romance comes to aid a series of purely physical sensations. The longing for the

delight of bodily exertion is coupled with the longing for glamour and mystery.

The elfin knight sits on yon hill,  
He blows his horn baith loud and shrill.  
He blows it east, he blows it west,  
He blows it where he lyketh best.

But the mountaineer's life is set in too great stress for his thoughts to wander vaguely in romance. His surroundings are harsh, trivial, sometimes sordid. All the common things of life come into the story. What he shall eat and what he shall drink and where-with he shall be clothed—these are matters of moment to him. He is driven to a form of expression which makes use alike of the grotesque and the rhetorical. It cannot be certain which is the truer mood, for both are genuine. His joys are varied as his days. They range from the simplest satisfaction of appetite, for food and drink and warmth, through all the gamut of perception and feeling, and leave him at peace but still desirous, 'all a wonder and a wild desire.'



OXFORD: HORACE HART  
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY





127327

HSw1  
S995p

Author Schuster, (Sir) Claud

Title Peaks and pleasant pastures.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
LIBRARY

Do not  
remove  
the card  
from this  
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket  
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."  
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU



UTL AT DOWNSVIEW



D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C  
39 14 08 07 09 011 2